THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD

by

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The following sequence is almost a home-movie. The images are grainy and seem bleached by sunlight, like an impressionist painting. They are scored to the narrator's voice and describe JESSE'S eccentricities and the circumstances of his daily life. There is no natural sound, just music that tugs at our sense of melancholy. Jesse is presented to us initially as a shadow, or with his back turned, as we approach this legendary figure gradually:

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. COTTAGE. - DUSK

NARRATOR (V/O)
He was growing into middle age and was living then in a bungalow on Woodland Avenue.

Green weeds split the porch steps, a wasp nest clings to an attic gable, a rope swing loops down from a dying elm tree and the ground below it is scuffed soft as flour.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He installed himself in a rocking chair and smoked a cigar down in the evening as his wife wiped her pink hands on an apron and reported happily on their two children.

INT. WOODLAND AVE. COTTAGE - DAY.

Action as per voice over:

NARRATOR (V/O)
Whenever he walked about the house, he carried several newspapers - the Sedalia *Daily democrat*, the St. Joseph *Gazette*, and the Kansas City *Times* - each with a foot-long .44 caliber pistol tucked into a fold.

EXT. STREET, KANSAS CITY - DAY.

JESSE, from a distance, a dandy in his gentleman's clothes and cane. Everyone seems to know him.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He went everywhere unrecognized and lunched with Kansas City shopkeepers and merchants, calling himself a cattleman or commodities investor, someone rich and leisured who had the common touch.

MONTAGE:

JESSE'S scars and wounds:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He had two incompletely healed bullet holes in his chest and another in his thigh. He was missing the nub of his left middle finger and was cautious lest that mutilation be seen.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. BACKYARD - DUSK.

JESSE looks out beyond the prairie wheat, to the dying sun.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He also had a condition that was referred to as granulated eyelids and it caused him to blink more than usual, as if he found creation slightly more than he could accept.

EXT. GARDEN PATCH - DAY.

He scours for nightcrawlers and flips them into manure pails. He chops them into writhing sections and sprinkles them over his garden patch.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He could neither multiply nor divide without error and much of his science was superstition. He could list the many begotten of Abraham and the sixty-six books of the king James Bible; he could recite psalms and poems in a stentorian voice with suitable histrionics; he could sing religious hymns so convincingly that he once worked as a choirmaster; he was marvelously informed about current events.

MONTAGE: JESSE'S beliefs.

NARRATOR (V/O)
And yet he thought incense was made from the bones of saints,

Bones are ground.

NARRATOR (V/O)
-that leather continued to grow if not dyed,

Leather grows.

NARRATOR (V/O)
-that if he concentrated hard enough his body's electrical currents could stun lake frogs as he bathed.

A frogs keels over. JESSE watches:

NARRATOR (V/O)
He could be reckless or serene, rational or lunatic, from one minute to the next.

INT. DRYGOODS STORE, KANSAS CITY - DAY.

Action as per voiceover:

NARRATOR (V/O)
If he made an entrance, heads turned in his direction; if he strode down an aisle storeclerks backed away;

EXT. STREET, KANSAS CITY - DAY.

A dog shies, its hackles raised.

NARRATOR (V/O)
if he neared animals they retreated.

INT. TOPEKA EXCHANGE SALOON, KANSAS CITY. DAY.

CUSTOMERS become disturbed, affected without knowing why.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Rooms seemed hotter when he was in them,

RAINFALL, as seen through a window:

NARRATOR (V/O)
rains fell straighter,

A CLOCKFACE:

NARRATOR (V/O)
clocks slowed,

CUTLERY clatters:

NARRATOR (V/O)
sounds were amplified:

ON JESSE as he slowly lifts a flaming hand:

NARRATOR (V/O)
His enemies would not have been much surprised if he produced horned owls from beer bottles or made candles out of his fingers.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. BACKYARD - DAY.

He wades barefoot through the backyard grass with his six-year-old-son hunched on his shoulders and his trousers rolled up to his knees.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He considered himself a Southern loyalist and guerrilla in a Civil War that never ended. He regretted neither his robberies nor the seventeen murders that he laid claim to,

INT. KITCHEN. WOODLAND AVE. COTTAGE - NIGHT

JESSE, sleepless, at the kitchen table:

NARRATOR (V/O)
-but he would brood about his slanders and slights, his callow need for attention, his overweening vaingloriousness, and he was excessively genteel and polite in order to disguise what he thought was vulgar, primitive, and depraved in his origins.

EXT. PRAIRIE. DUSK.

JESSE in the prairie wheat at dusk.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Sicknesses made him smell blood each morning, he visited rooms at night, he sometimes heard children in the fruit cellar, he waded into prairie wheat and stared at the horizon.

CLOSE on JESSE, his eyes impossibly blue:

NARRATOR (V/O)
He had seen another summer under in Kansas City, Missouri, and on September 5th, in the year 1881, he was thirty-four years old.

FADE OUT

EXT. BLUE CUT (AS SEEN FROM THE SOUTHERN RIDGE) - DAY.

Thirty feet below is a cinder roadbed, the sickle curve of rails, the grade that is hard work for a locomotive. Beyond that is the northern ridge - a lower elevation - rising ten feet above the cut.

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - DAY.

FRANK JAMES (stern, 38) stands back in the green darkness, studying the terrain. Off-screen we hear the sound of some fool crashing through the weeds to the rear of him. FRANK opens his coat and slides his hand over his revolver.

VOICE (OFF-SCREEN)
Excuse me, but I see I've sort of traipsed in and interrupted you.

FRANK turns to see a boy in a stovepipe hat and an overlarge black coat that's cinched by a low-slung holster. His hands are overhead as if a gun is upon him.

FRANK
Which one are you?

BOB
Bob Ford.

FRANK
Ah, Charley's brother.

BOB receives this as an invitation to lower his hands. He hunkers down next to FRANK and takes off his hat.

BOB
I was lying when I said I just happened down here. I've been looking for you. I feel lousy that I didn't say so at the outset.

FRANK digs in his pockets and extracts cigarette makings. He's not inclined to converse.

BOB
Folks sometimes take me for a nincompoop on account of the shabby first impression I make, whereas I've always thought of myself as being just a rung down from the James brothers. And, well, I was hoping if I ran into you aside from those peckerwoods, I could show you how special I am. I honestly believe I'm destined for great things, Mr. James. I've got qualities that don't come shining through right at the outset, but give me a chance and I'll get the job done - I can guarantee you that.

FRANK slimes his cigarette and strikes a match off his boot sole.

FRANK
You're not so special Mr. Ford. You're just like any other tyro who's prinked himself up for an escapade. You're hoping to be a gunslinger like those nickel books are about, but you may as well quench your mind of it. You don't have the ingredients.

BOB slaps a mosquito and looks at his blood freckled palm.

BOB
I'm sorry to hear you feel that way since I put such stock in your opinions.

He stands and rehats himself.

BOB
As for me being a gunslinger, I've just got this one granddaddy Patterson Colt and a borrowed belt to stick it in. But I've also got an appetite for greater things. I hoped joining up with you would put me that much closer to getting them. And that's the plain and simple truth of the matter.

FRANK
So what do you want me to say?

BOB
You'll let me be your sidekick tonight.

FRANK
Sidekick?

BOB
So you can examine my grit and intelligence.

FRANK examines his cigarette, sucks it once more, and flips it onto the roadbed.

FRANK
I don't know what it is about you, but the more you talk, the more you give me the willies. I don't believe I even want you as close as earshot this evening.

BOB
I'm sorry-

FRANK
(interrupting)
Why don't you *go*?

And, after a beat, BOB tramps up the hill, slapping weeds aside.

EXT. WOODS. (MOVING WITH BOB TO THE GANG'S CAMP) DAY.

BOB passes a number of horses reined to a piece of rope fixed between two trees. He passes MEN aged in their late teens and early twenties - hooligans mainly, boys with vulgar features and sullen eyes. They cradle shotguns and wear patched coveralls and foul looking suit coats. They are known collectively as THE CRACKERNECK BOYS and are just here to provide 'atmosphere' at the robbery and easy prey for the sheriff afterwards. BOB clears this group and arrives to a view of JESSE surrounded by the inner gang; the current apostles:

ROBERT WOODSON HITE (WOOD) is JESSE'S cousin, sulking and mooning over some imagined slight.

CHARLEY FORD is BOB'S older brother, who chuckles and brays and hee-haws and who covers his left boot with a coat in order to conceal a clubfoot.

DICK LIDDIL and ED MILLER can be seen in the background, working over a cast iron pot:

ED MILLER is the anxious type; has a streak of spit where his spine ought to be.

DICK LIDDIL is a good-looking horse-thief.

BOB eyes this group hungrily, coveting admission. He then crosses the ground just as DICK LIDDIL rattles the pot and sings out:

DICK
Chowtime!

JESSE is the last to rise, and BOB closes in on him like a valet.

BOB
Am I too late to wish you a happy birthday?

JESSE
How'd you know?

BOB
You'd be surprised at what I've got stored away. I'm an authority on the James boys.

JESSE
Your name isn't Bunny Ford, is it?

BOB begins to nod, then checks himself:

BOB
Why no. It's Robert Ford.

JESSE
Of course it is.

BOB
Bob.

JESSE
You've never been with the gang before, have you?

BOB
Oh no sirree. I'm a virgin. At least in that one respect, if you get my meaning.

JESSE takes a heaped bowl from DICK LIDDIL in his gunnysack apron. He lowers himself onto a stump and BOB squats in the dirt at his feet.

JESSE
Yes?

BOB
Your brother Frank and I just had a real nice visit. Must've been a hundred subjects entertained, having to do with the Chicago and Alton Railroad and the assignments on board the cars.

JESSE, bored, closes his eyes and exercises a crick in his neck.

BOB
Well, the upshot was, we sort of mutually agreed that I should use my abilities as your helper and, you know, apprentice. So we could be confederates together and come out of this unscathed. That was the upshot.

JESSE opens his eyes and squints at BOB.

JESSE
Well, Buck does the figuring. Do you know what this stew needs, Bob?

BOB is perplexed:

BOB
Dumplings?

JESSE
Noodles. You eat yourself some noodle stew and your clock will tick all night. You ever see that woman over in Fayette could suck noodles up her nose?

BOB
Don't believe I have.

JESSE
You've got canals in your head you never dreamed of.

BOB is dumbfounded.

BOB
I don't like to harp on a subject but-

JESSE
I don't care who comes with me. Never have. I'm what they call gregarious.

FRANK JAMES is drinking coffee and scowling as he sits on the far side of the fire. JESSE raises his voice:

JESSE
I hear you and young Stovepipe here had a real nice visit.

FRANK looks askance at BOB and flings the dregs of his coffee onto the ground.

FRANK
(terse)
Your boys have got about an acre of rock to haul, Dingus. You'd better goose them down yonder.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - DAY.

A cotton wood tree is skidded down the bank and heaved over the polished steel rails. The CRACKERNECK BOYS carry boulders of lime and sandstone which they fort around the tree as shovels sing and picks splinter. JESSE supervises the rock piling, recommending land to be mined for stone, chewing his green cigar black.

Shadows grow long and die. Clouds brick overhead and brindle pink. Then crimson. Then violet. Then black.

EXT. NORTHERN RIDGE - NIGHT.

BOB holds a match for JESSE as he reads the dial of a pocket watch.

JESSE
You can stick with me but don't heel. I don't want to bust into you every time I have the notion to change direction.

BOB
I'm not a moron, for Heaven's sake.

JESSE curtains his coat halves over his revolvers.

JESSE
They're supposed to have a hundred thousand dollars in that express car; at least that's what the gossip is.

BOB
My fingers are already starting to itch.

JESSE squats and strikes a match and turns up the flame of a lantern. He then wads a red flannel sleeve around the glass chimney and the yellow light rubies.

FRANK calls from above:

FRANK (OFFSCREEN)
That's ideal.

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - NIGHT.

FRANK is up on the South Ridge with DICK LIDDIL, WOOD HITE, ED MILLER, and CHARLEY FORD. He watches the CRACKERNECK BOYS who ramble lackadaisically along the tracks, rifles hoisted, dangerously crossing paths with each other in the night.

FRANK
Look at those fools. They're going to trip and shoot each other into females.

DICK
I'll bet I can find them husbands if they do.

This jollies even FRANK.

EXT. NORTHERN RIDGE. NIGHT.

JESSE holds the lantern over his pocket watch. Both hands near the IX.

JESSE
About two years ago we robbed the same railroad, only it was right in Glendale we boarded her.

BOB
I know that. You might not realize it yet but I'm a storehouse of information about the James gang. I mean I've followed your *careers.*

BOB stuffs a white handkerchief under his stovepipe hat so that it conceals his face. (One eyehole has been cut slightly lower than the other - creating the impression that he is cock-eyed and pitiable - not at all what he had mind.)

JESSE
Do you know what happened five years ago to the day? To the day? What happened on September seventh in eighteen seventy-six?

BOB
You made an attempt on a Northfield, Minnesota, bank. Wasn't it owned by General Ben Butler? The Scourge of New Orleans?

JESSE
That's right.

BOB
Knew it.

JESSE
Bill Chadwell, Clell Miller, Charlie Pitts - they were killed outright. The Youngers have been in prison ever since. It's painful to recall.

BOB
And you never got a plug nickel from that bank.

JESSE
So you can see how this date would have an aroma for me.

Then JESSE pricks up likes an animal might.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT.

He hops down the bank in three plunging steps, shakes out his trouser cuffs, and kneels to put his ear to the rails. The hum of the locomotive is like insects in a jar.

JESSE
She's right on schedule, Buck!

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - NIGHT.

FRANK stubs out his cigarette and turns to DICK.

FRANK
You'd better go on down to Jesse.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT.

JESSE raises the blue bandana over his nose and places his right boot on the rail as DICK slides down the southern cliff. DICK ties a red bandana over his face and ambles over, shaking the dust from his shirt.

The locomotive's chuffing is growing loud.

JESSE'S right foot tickles with rail vibrations.

The headlamp's aisle of white light fills the forest passage, streaks across scrub and bush, then bends and floods toward JESSE. He swings his red-lantern in a yard master's signal to stop. The brakes are engaged with an ear splitting scream. Couplings bang. Sparks slice off the rails as the engine swiftly decelerates. And a great cloud of steam breaks over JESSE.

Then the GANG is running and bounding and skidding down the embankments.

BOB FORD slides down like a debutante in petticoats, his left hand snatching at roots while his right unveils his eyes long enough to peek around at the commotion:

MEN rush alongside the train levering their rifles in a manner they fancy is ghoulish and frightening.

JESSE hops out of the steam and up onto the cab step and cocks his revolver. The ENGINEER cringes down behind his hands:

ENGINEER
Don't shoot! Ain't no call for that!

JESSE
You two best come down from your machine and bring a coal pick along.

ENGINEER
You've got the gun.

He obediently drops a coal pick onto the cinderbed and climbs down. The STOKER follows - he's scared sick, sweat crawls over the filth of his face. He looks about sixteen. JESSE shakes the hands of both workers:

JESSE
Gentlemen, I'm Jesse James; the man you've read so much about.

EXT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - NIGHT.

The BAGGAGEMASTER and EXPRESS MESSENGER have their heads tilted out the door at radically different heights.

BAGGAGEMASTER
Opie? We're going to bolt this door from the inside.

EXPRESS MESSENGER
I'd say that's a good idea.

The door slams.

INT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - NIGHT.

The two men stack chicken coops, bags and boxes to hide the Adams Express Company safe.

BAGGAGEMASTER
If they push you to the brink, do what you must to save your own skin.

EXPRESS MESSENGER
Thanks for the reminder.

The MESSENGER leans himself against the doorframe and peeks through a crack. He sees:

A man in a confederate officer's coat and blue bandana mask limping toward the express section with the young STOKER in tow. Behind him a young boy in a stovepipe hat points the ENGINEER in the same direction with his revolver.

EXT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - NIGHT.

The ENGINEER tries the doorknob. Then tries again with his weight behind it.

ENGINEER
It's locked.

JESSE re-cocks his revolver.

JESSE
Why don't you smash it in.

The ENGINEER grunts the coal pick up and swings it into the door near the latch. The wood splinters loudly. He has to tug hard to extricate the embedded spike.

JESSE
(to BOB)
The locked doors and the smashing them down, that's a little skit we run through each time — sort of like grace before dinner.

The ENGINEER swings again:

INT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - SAMETIME.

The wood screams and folds inward from the blow. The MESSENGER sees that they'll get in anyway and goes for the bolts:

MESSENGER
All right! All right! You can come in now!

JESSE socks the door open, heaves his chest onto the threshold and knees himself into the room. DICK LIDDIL, ED MILLER and the come-lately CHARLEY FORD follow him. A lantern is passed up as JESSE lifts packages and shakes them and guesses at their contents:

JESSE
That's a woman's satchel; all fancy bead work and paper flowers.

MESSENGER
(nervous grin)
Could be.

JESSE smashes another box on a nail and snags it open, finding inside a photograph of a child in an oval frame, the cheek torn by a nail. He looks at it a moment and then glares at the frightened MESSENGER:

JESSE
I want you to open that safe.

The MESSENGER looks to the BAGGAGEMASTER for council - but the man's head is down. He looks back at JESSE with his nervous smile. CHARLEY FORD steps forward and strikes him over the skull with his pistol. The man drops to his knees, blood shoelacing his face. The BAGGAGEMASTER backs to wall in horror.

ED MILLER
You didn't have to bop him, Charley.

JESSE
Yes, he did. They need the convincing. They got their company rules and I got my mean streak and that's how we get things done.

CHARLEY grins with accomplishment and JESSE clears some registers off the only safe he can see.

JESSE
Come over here and attend to this now.

We hear a wild and scrambled off-screen fusillade and DICK leans outside to see what's going on:

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT.

The CRACKERNECKS are firing at TWO FIGURES crouching with a red lantern. FRANK JAMES hollers for them to cease, and after a further twenty rounds they do.

DICK sees BOB FORD squatting in the weeds, standing guard over the STOKER and ENGINEER, his cocked revolver up next to his cheek.

DICK
(calling)
Scare ya?

BOB stands sheepishly:

BOB
I couldn't tell what on earth was going on!

INT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - NIGHT.

The EXPRESS MESSENGER jerks the company vault door open. CHARLEY FORD empties the contents of the safe into a grain sack which he hands to JESSE. JESSE puzzles over it's contents.

JESSE
Isn't no hundred thousand dollars in here, Dick.

DICK looks into the grain sack:

DICK
I'm real disappointed.

JESSE turns on the EXPRESS MESSENGER:

JESSE
Get down on your knees.

MESSENGER
Why?

JESSE
You oughta pray; I'm going to kill you.

ED MILLER
(panic)
Hey?

JESSE
Get down!

MESSENGER
You'll have to make me.

JESSE
All right.

JESSE socks the man with his pistol and he drops like empty clothes. JESSE looks at him for a moment, then cocks his pistol and puts it against the unconscious man's head. ED MILLER reacts with horror:

ED MILLER
Don't shoot him!

JESSE grins, uncocks the pistol, and picks up the grain sack.

JESSE
Don't you tell me what I can and can't do.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT.

BOB FORD, standing over the ENGINEER and the STOKER, watches as JESSE jumps down from the EXPRESS CAR. JESSE encourages the MESSENGER and BAGGAGEMASTER outside with his gun. The MESSENGER staggers over towards BOB, bleeding profusely, and crashes down into the weeds. BOB gapes at the wound in panic.

JESSE
We're going to go through the cars. If any of them so much as twitch, give their coconuts a sockdolager: that's a language they understand.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT.

WOOD HITE'S boot slams the door aside, and he enters, an eye-holed flour sack over his head, his twelve-gauge thrust forward:

WOOD HITE
Throw up your hands, you sons-a-bitches!

And for emphasis he slaps a MAN in the mouth.

Then FRANK JAMES enters in his gray coat and yellow bandana.

He sees thirty MEN either cowering or flinching or accusing him with their eyes, while the WIVES scrunch down behind their husbands' shoulders.

He strides down the aisle, imperious as Victoria's consort, his bootheels barking on the oakwood flooring. He scowls and lingers over any who seem recalcitrant, ticking a button or collar with his Remington revolver.

FRANK
Are any of you preachers?

No one raises a hand.

FRANK
Are any of you widows?

Some frown with curiosity.

FRANK
We never rob preachers or widows.

Four hands shoot up.

FRANK
No; no, you're too late.

FRANK nods to the rear of the coach and JIM CUMMINS scuttles forward and punches his revolver into the into the coat of a man.

JIM CUMMINS
I'm Jesse James, ya damned yellow dog! Gimme all your money!

The MAN fiddles in his coat and produces a worn envelope full of bills and an English gold watch.

A bearded man with spectacles hands FRANK JAMES a roll of bills, but FRANK has a hunch about him and puts a cocked revolver to his forehead:

FRANK
Delve a little deeper.

The man turns up a further hundred dollars.

JESSE raps on the doorglass with his gun. Frank swivels and waves him in. DICK and CHARLEY follow.

FRANK
Just work your way to the middle.

The GANG make their way down the coach with sacks, stealing coins, dollars, watches, bracelets, rings, stickpins, pendants.

Children wail in corners, several women have become hysterical. Men sit in chairs with blank faces, their hands lumped in their laps, having lost fortunes; their crabbed savings, the cost of a cottage, the auction sale of six Holstein cows, a laggard Silver Anniversary watch.

EXT. PASSENGER CAR PLATFORM - LATER.

A dispirited JESSE exits onto the platform where he sees FRANK and some of the others shedding loot into a flour sack. WOOD HITE and ED MILLER pass by him with fire axes. A young BRAKEMAN sits nearby looking bankrupt.

JESSE
How much did you lose?

BRAKEMAN
Fifty cents and that was all I had.

JESSE digs into his grain sack and hands the BRAKEMAN a dollar fifty.

JESSE
Here's the principal and interest on your money.

The sound of wood splintering is heard and JESSE turns to see WOOD HITE and ED MILLER attacking the bedding and boxes in the sleeper carriage. The whole affair degenerating into a carousal. JESSE shouts at them:

JESSE
Okay! Enough! Let's vamoose!

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - NIGHT.

The gang scrabble up the bank to the woods. We follow BOB to where CHARLEY waits with the gathered horses. BOB removes his mask with the cut out eyes.

CHARLEY
I was in top form tonight. Did you see me roast that one gent for standing on his cash?

BOB
No. I missed that. I was outside, y'see.

CHARLEY
He kind of skidded when he walked was how I knew. And his wife, she was in a state, her beady little eyes all squinched up.

BOB
Really took the cake, did she?

CHARLEY
Oh my, yes. Jesse's gonna be satisfied with me.

EXT. NEARBY CORNFIELD - NIGHT.

JESSE'S horse prances impatiently as he removes a document from his shirt and displays it for the assembled GANG:

JESSE
This here is a proclamation by the governor of Missouri.
(beat, he glares for effect)
It mentions Glendale and how certain parties confederated to steal what was on that train. It goes on about the Winston shebang last summer and then it says that the governor, one Thomas T. Crittenden, is offering a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest and delivery of Frank James or Jesse James to the sheriff of Daviess County. It goes on to offer a further reward of five thousand dollars for our conviction of either of these crimes. The governor has a regular toothache over the James gang. My guess is he'll agree to just about anything thing if it'll make the pain go away.
(beat)
But you won't none of you get away with bargaining or making exchanges. I've got a wife and two children I've got to look out for.

ED MILLER
You can trust me.

Jesse rocks back and gives himself over to a long thought before replying:

JESSE
I know I can, Ed.

EXT. KANSAS CITY, OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT.

The JAMES the FORD BROTHERS and WOOD HITE ride into KANSAS CITY under a cold rain that knuckles their hats and sinks their horses deep in the mire.

INT. WOODLAND AVE. COTTAGE - NIGHT.

ZEE JAMES is asleep on the sofa. JESSE creaks open the kitchen door and surprises her awake with a kiss.

INT. WOODLAND AVE. KITCHEN - NIGHT.

ZEE boils water.

JESSE
I was at a cattle auction in Independence. Had a good day too.

She doesn't look up from the saucepan.

ZEE
So you've got money again?

JESSE
Come out of it real satisfactory.

He jumps up from his chair and ganders out at the red barn. He can't sit still.

JESSE
Guess who I ran into?

She gives JESSE a wifely look and removes a jar from the pantry shelf.

JESSE
Buck, for one. Then Wood Hite and two coves of his. They're with the animals right now.

ZEE
They do satisfactory at the auction, too?

JESSE
(grins)
About the most they ask is that they come out of a swap meet with all their fingers and toes.

He adjusts a dry hat on his head, and then, without justifying his exit, heads out to the stables.

INT. BARN. WOODLAND AVE - NIGHT.

Coal-oil lanterns gladden the interior of the barn, but FRANK JAMES is gloomy and glaring at the younger men's slipshod management of their horses. He sees JESSE appear at the Dutch door and grumpily seats himself on a long bench, his legs wide, his fingers joined around a yellow cigarette. The JAMES brothers do not speak.

EXT. BARN. WOODLAND AVE - NIGHT.

JESSE stands just inside the sloshing eave peering at his older brother with melancholy. It's a moment before he perceives that BOB FORD is standing to his right.

JESSE
You must've creeped up on cat's paws.

BOB
I'll wager that's the first and last time you'll ever be caught off-guard.

JESSE
How old are you, kid?

BOB
Twenty. (beat) Except I won't really be twenty until January. (He scratches his sleeve apologetically.) I'm nineteen.

JESSE
You feel older than that though, don't you?

BOB
Yes, I do.

JESSE
You enjoy yourself this evening?

BOB
I was strung too high for much pleasure.

JESSE seems to think this an appropriate remark.

JESSE
Do you like tea?

INT. BARN. WOODLAND AVE. - LATER.

FRANK gathers two horse blankets and makes his way to an empty stall.

CHARLEY
Do you think the sheriff's out already?

FRANK
Generally is.

CHARLEY slinks over to the stall and watches as the grim man hangs his coat.

CHARLEY
I wasn't just flapping my lips about my kid brother and me. What I figured was if you and Jesse could gauge our courage and daring, you just might make us your regular sidekicks.

FRANK shoots him a look of umbrage as he spreads out a wool blanket on the straw.

FRANK
You're beginning to sound like Bob.

CHARLEY
I'll be square with you: it was Bob who put me up to it. He's got plans for the James boys that I can't even get the hang of, they're that complicated.

FRANK settles into repose, wrapping another horse blanket around him.

FRANK
You might as well forget everything about that because there'll be no more monkey business after tonight. You can jot it down in your diary: September seventh, eighteen eighty-one; the James gang robbed one last train at Blue Cut and gave up their nightriding for good.

CHARLEY
How will you make your living?

FRANK is smoking a cigarette with his eyes shut.

FRANK
Maybe I'll sell shoes.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. PORCH - NIGHT.

JESSE and BOB come out onto the porch with a candle and two cigars. JESSE lowers into a rocker and BOB takes the mating chair. BOB bends forward over the flame and lights his cigar.

BOB
I can't believe I woke up this morning wondering if my Daddy would loan me his overcoat, and here it is just past midnight and I've already robbed a railroad and I'm sitting in a rocking chair chatting with none other than Jesse James.

JESSE
It's a wonderful world.

BOB
Have you ever heard outlaws call dollar bills 'Williams'? I read that in *Morrison's Sensational Series*. You see, Bill is a nickname for William.

JESSE
I see.

BOB
You haven't heard anybody say it though?

JESSE
Can't say so.

BOB
You know what I've got right next to my bed? *The Trainrobbers, or a story of the James Boys*, by R. W. Stevens. Many's the night I've stayed up with my mouth open and my eyes jumping out, reading about your escapades in the *Wide Awake Library*.

JESSE
They're all lies, you know.

BOB
'Course they are.

JESSE
You don't have to keep smoking that if it's making you bungey.

BOB is relieved. He reaches over the banister and drops the cigar in a puddle. JESSE smiles:

JESSE
You know what Charley once told me about you? He said you had a shoebox practically filled with James boys mementoes.

BOB submerges his resentment.

BOB
That must have been a couple of years ago.

JESSE
Or maybe it was Bunny who did that.

BOB
You're making sport of me, aren't you.

JESSE catches BOB'S wrist and puts a finger to his lips: A stooped MAN with a lunchpail tramps through the rainmuck of the street.

JESSE
(calling out)
Evening, Chas!

CHAS
J.T.

JESSE
They've got you working late again!

CHAS
James gang robbed another train.

JESSE
You don't mean it!
(calling after him)
If they put a posse together get me into it, will ya?

The man crosses the street to his yard.

BOB
You really are the cool customer they make you out to be. I'm impressed as all get-out.

JESSE seems suddenly glum.

JESSE
I'm a no good, Bob. I ain't Jesus.

JESSE gets up, goes back inside the bungalow, and closes the door.

FADE OUT.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. HOUSE - DAY

FRANK JAMES and family are assembled in traveling clothes around a PHAETON CARRIAGE. ZEE hugs ANNIE RALSTON JAMES and then grasps 3 year-old ROB to her bosom. FRANK receives her kiss like medicine, and then turns to the backyard to see his younger brother angrily looking away.

INT. WOODLAND AVE. HOUSE - DAY

BOB watches from the Kitchen window as the Phaeton pulls away, then drops his cup in the sink and heads out to the backyard.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. BACKYARD - DAY

JESSE sits in a rocker that is submerged to its seat in grass and weeds. Beat.

JESSE
My brother and me, we're scarcely on speaking terms these days.

BOB
I wasn't going to mention it.

JESSE reaches into a tin under his chair and hauls up two writhing snakes. BOB flinches.

JESSE
You scared?

BOB
Just surprised a little.

JESSE
They aren't as succulent as I like and they're the devil to clean but if a man skins them and fries them in garlic and oil - mercy, it's good eating.

BOB
I've never been that hungry.

JESSE unfolds a four-inch knife and lifts the head of a snake on the blade.

JESSE
I give them names.

BOB
Such as?

JESSE
Such as enemies. I give them the names of enemies.

He lays the snakes on the arm of his chair and carefully saws off their heads with his knife. The bodies curl and thrash. He flicks the heads into the grass.

JESSE
Go tell Wood and Charley to get their gatherings together.

BOB
Me too?

JESSE
You can stay.

INT. BARN, WOODLAND AVE. - DAY.

The dismissal hits WOOD hard:

WOOD
I'm his cousin! My momma was his daddy's--?

BOB
Sister.

WOOD
That's right! So how come it's me who has to rattle his hocks out of town?

CHARLEY is already packing.

CHARLEY
If I know Jess, there's some real nasty sad-suzie work that's got to be done around here and Bob's the ninny that has to do it.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. BACKYARD - DAY

When they exit JESSE is at the compost crib, drooling the snake bodies onto the mulch.

JESSE
Wood? You tell your daddy I'll be in Kentucky in October and maybe we can hunt some birds together.

WOOD
But how come it's Bob who gets to stay?

JESSE
Bob's going to move my gear to a house down the street.

CHARLEY winks at his brother.

CHARLEY
See.

BOB
I don't mind.
(though of course he does)
Sounds like an adventure.

CHARLEY jumps up onto his mare and addresses JESSE:

CHARLEY
If you ever need me to make smoke someplace again, a body can usually find me at my sister's - over at the Harbison homestead.

JESSE
I'll keep it in mind.

WOOD
You know where I'll be.

JESSE limps over to the bungalow.

JESSE
It's been pleasant.

At the porch door he gives BOB an exacting look which implies he's already beginning to suspect his own judgment.

JESSE
You've got some packing to do, kid.

EXT. TROOST AVE. HOUSE - NIGHT

NARRATOR (V/O)
They moved to 1017 Troost Avenue at night so that the neighborhood couldn't get a good look at them or their belongings.

BOB is does all the lifting, JESSE provides direction.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
And then Bob thought Jesse would give him eight hours sleep and a daydreaming goodbye;

INT. TROOST AVE. HOUSE - DAY

The FAMILY are assembled around the dining table. BOB seems to be hoping his continued presence wont be noticed.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
-but with a second day in the J.T. Jackson house, Bob thought he might never go but might be brought in as a good-natured cousin to the boy and a gentleman helper to Zee.

EXT. BARN, TROOST AVE. HOUSE - DAY

Action as per voice-over:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He curried the horse next to the horse that Jesse curried.

EXT. PORCH, TROOST AVE. HOUSE - DAY

Action as per voice-over:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He smoked a cigar that matched the cigar that Jesse smoked. They rocked in chairs on the front porch-

INT. TOPEKA EXCHANGE SALOON - DAY

Action as per voice-over:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
-and made trips to the Topeka Exchange saloon, where Jesse could spend nearly sixty minutes sipping one glass of beer and still complain about feeling tipsy.

ANGLE ON BOB:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
Bob would rarely vouchsafe his opinions as they talked. If spoken to, he would fidget and grin;

EXT. TOPEKA EXCHANGE SALOON - DAY

JESSE chats with a man in the street. Move in on BOB.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
if Jesse palavered with another person, Bob secretaried their dialogue, getting each inflection, reading every gesture and tick, as if he wanted to compose a biography of the outlaw, or as if he were preparing an impersonation.

EXT. MISSOURI RIVER - DUSK

JESSE wades in the shallows with his trousers rolled.

BOB nannies TIM on the steep bank. A fire burns next to them.

JESSE sloshes up the cliff and looks down at the fishing lines.

JESSE
Any nibbles?

BOB
Can't say I've felt even a twitch, Jess.

JESSE
(cautions:)
Little rabbits have big ears, Bob.

BOB
Dave. Could be it's not night enough yet, Dave.

JESSE turns to the boy:

JESSE
You want to go play?

TIM slides down the weeds without saying, going down to the water his father had walked in. JESSE unlids a mason jar and hands it to BOB. BOB swallows, spilling beer on his chin.

JESSE
Good?

BOB
Good as baby Jesus in velvet pants.

JESSE scowls at the blasphemy.

JESSE
Your people God-fearing, Bob?

BOB
Oh heavenly days, yes. My daddy's a part-time preacher.

JESSE
Rich or poor?

BOB thinks about it.

BOB
Prosperous, I guess. He could give me plenty of money but he's got this philosophy that his boys ought to feel some hardships or else they'll spoil.

JESSE
A man of principles.

BOB
People say that when really they only want to make you unhappy.

TIM swats the river with a washed-up board. JESSE calls to him:

JESSE
Don't get yourself all soaked now you little honyock.

JESSE starts putting on his socks and boots.

JESSE
You ever hear any gossip about my father and Frank's being two different men?

BOB
Yes.

JESSE
They say that was the reason my papa went West in the Gold Rush: he couldn't support the shame of it. What do you think of a story like that?

BOB
I'm more personally interested in what you think of it.

JESSE
(angry)
I think it's a goddamned lie.

BOB
I'm with you then; and I won't hear another word on it if the subject ever comes up.

BOB removes his hat and scratches his head.

BOB
Since we're telling stories, have you heard the one about the James gang robbing the railroad?

JESSE
You're not giving me enough clues.

BOB
It's a funny story.

JESSE shakes his head and takes another drink.

BOB
You see, the James gang is robbing this railroad train like you do, and on board is this Quaker minister, some old coot with a long beard and a mean disposition. He's got this pinched-up wife with him and she's shivering with fright and clutching his sleeve. You sure you haven't heard this?

JESSE
I would have stopped you by now.

BOB
How's it go? I've gotta get this right. Oh! I guess it's you: You stand in this railroad coach and you holler, 'I'm Jesse James! And here's what I'm gonna do! I'm gonna grab all your money. I'm gonna grab all your jewelry! I'm gonna grab everything you own! The preacher's wife is cringing now, and cowering behind the old coot and you say, 'And then I'm gonna go down the aisle and rape all you women!'

JESSE
I don't like the way this story's headed.

BOB
Well, everyone knows it's not true, Jess; it's just sort of comical. Anyway, the Quaker ups and says, 'Surely you wouldn't rape a preacher's wife!' And the wife gives him an elbow and says, 'Shut up, Homer! It's Jesse's train. Let him rob it the way he wants to.'

JESSE isn't laughing.

BOB
You don't think it's funny?

JESSE
Well, hell, how could I if it isn't true?

BOB
Jokes don't need to be, Jesse.

JESSE
You're gonna have to explain why I oughta laugh then.

BOB
(impatient)
Why don't we just forget it.
(then, scared:)
I didn't mean to sound sharp just then.

JESSE adjusts his jacket sleeves.

JESSE
I've got a story for you that's true as a razor. This'll give you an example of putting a man in his place, and it don't depend upon any prevaricating. Once me and Frank were riding in the countryside and got hungry, so we went up to this farmhouse and asked would this widow lady make us some supper.

BOB
Oh, that one.

JESSE
You've heard it?

BOB
Only about twenty times.

JESSE is as still as a shut-down machine.

BOB
I'd love the chance to hear you tell it, though. I imagine you'll make it more interesting.

JESSE
'I'll gladly pay you,' I say, and she said that was all right, we looked like genuine Christians and she'd do us the good turn. Kid, I want to tell you, that was one scrumptious supper. She went all out. But Frank saw she was crying and when he asked why, she said the mortgage was coming due and that the loan manager was going to be there any minute to repossess the place. And her a poor Widow! Can you imagine? Well now, Frank and me, we insist on paying her something; and you know what we gave her?

BOB
Enough to pay off the mortgage.

JESSE
You *have* heard this one.

BOB
But no one ever said the supper was scrumptious. This is fascinating.

JESSE
So we gave her what she needed and we go, and on the highway who's coming our way but the loan manager. He greets us but doesn't give Frank and me a second thought, he's that greedy to get hold of that farm. Much to his surprise, of course, she paid him off and in no time he was plodding along the road with his wallet bulging his coat out and his grin on a little tighter. And that's when Frank and me come out of the woods with masks on and steal all our money back!

JESSE laughs uproariously, slapping his thigh like a plowboy.

BOB
And you're saying that's a true story.

JESSE
Is!

BOB
Jesse!

JESSE
(testy)
You calling me a liar?

TIM crawls back up from the river and plops down in his father's lap. He throws a rock and the river glunks.

JESSE
Don't do that, son. You'll scare all the fishes away.

TIM
Daddy, I'm boring.

JESSE
(laughs)
You mean, you're bored.

TIM
Yes.

JESSE hugs the boy to him:

JESSE
Maybe a fish will come and get you all excited.

TIM
I don't like fishing.

JESSE
Sure you do. *I* do. You must.

The boy sinks into his father's jacket. The river is the only noise.

JESSE
You know what we are, Tim? We're nighthawks. We're the ones who go out at night and guard everything so people can sleep in peace. We've got our eyes peeled; no one's going to slip anything past us.

BOB
I've got something!

JESSE
You sure?

BOB
It's heavy!

JESSE sidles next to him and clearly struggles with the temptation to seize the pole from BOB'S grip.

JESSE
Don't horse it, kid. Bring it up easy.

BOB steps on the bamboo pole and hauls the weight up with both hands. The catch is heaved onto the river bank: It's a gruesome fish, a prehistoric thing that seems overdue for extinction. Round as a dog with feelers that move like thumbs on its skull. TIM backs into his father's leg.

JESSE
God damn it, but that's an ugly thing.

Its teeth mesh and unmesh with a click. Its gill wings undulate. Jesse is disgusted.

JESSE
Kill him, kid.

BOB takes a burning stick from the fire and stabs it into the fish over and over again.

JESSE
That's enough!

JESSE glares at BOB, as though he's been given a sign and will now act accordingly.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Bob was sent away the next day as he knew he would be.

EXT. STORE, LIBERTY - DAY.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
And it was already noon by the time he attained Liberty.

BOB waters his horse at a trough. He sinks a dipper into a water pail. And, as he raises it, he catches sight of his reflection:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
Here, he viewed himself in a store window and was discouraged by the reflection: A scroungy boy in a ridiculous stovepipe hat. He thought himself goofy and juvenile.

INT. STORE, LIBERTY - DAY.

BOB cruises the aisles: Prince Albert suits; greatcoats with caped shoulders; knee length frock coats. Bowlers; derbies; fedoras; slouch hats.

BOB selects a fine white shirt, white underwear and a heather green suit. He crowns his head with a black bowler hat that is ribboned with black silk.

The STORE OWNER totals the prices on a newspaper.

STORE OWNER
You come into some money, is that?

BOB
You might say that.

STORE OWNER
Do you mind if I ask how you got it, being's you're so young?

BOB
Only thing necessary is a great aunt who loves her nephew to pieces.

STORE OWNER
Inheritance. I see.

BOB puts his finger on the twine intersection so the STORE OWNER can make a knot.

BOB
You were probably thinking I got the cash like the James gang would. Am I right or wrong?

The STORE OWNER winks.

STORE OWNER
Don't think I don't appreciate the business.

EXT. STORE, LIBERTY - DAY

BOB exits and mounts his horse. A moment later the STOREOWNER comes out. He crosses the street to the livery and approaches SHERIFF JAMES TIMBERLAKE. We can't make out his words but he points in the direction BOB has ridden in.

EXT. HARBISON FARM (AS SEEN FROM A DISTANCE)- DAY

BOB approaches on horseback.

EXT. YARD, HARBISON FARM - DAY.

DICK LIDDIL is at the yard swing with Bob's niece, IDA (12 years old), twisting the seat until the ropes are raveled. He releases her and she twirls, squealing, her auburn hair flying out.

WOOD HITE stands on the kitchen porch, stern as John the Baptist.

WOOD
You're gonna make her sick! She's gonna upchuck, you don't watch out!

DICK cuffs the girl's dress so that it blooms and reveals her thighs.

IDA
You're not supposed to peek, Dick!

DICK
But you're so pretty! I can't help myself!

BOB, approaching, calls:

BOB
Howdy!

But they ignore him. WOOD, jealous, slams the screen door shut.

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAY

BOB can be heard before he's seen:

BOB (OFF-SCREEN)
Howdy!

Neither CHARLEY nor MARTHA BOLTON (BOB & CHARLEY'S SISTER) look up.

BOB
Howdy!

BOB enters, making a b-line for the staircase and his bedroom.

BOB
I'm finally home!

MARTHA
I'm real glad, Bob.

CHARLEY
I'm in that room too, Bob. Don't mess up my things.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAY.

BOB reaches under his bed and hooks out a shoe-box. He opens the lid and lays it on the bed. From his pocket he removes a cigar butt and wraps it in the eye-holed white handkerchief. He tucks this little bundle into the box alongside about lurid nickel books about the James gang, civil war photographs, yellowed newspaper articles, and other James brothers' mementoes. Then he squirms his boots off and strips out of his month old clothes.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAY.

BOB comes downstairs in his filthy union suit. He carries a towel, a cake of soap and a tile brush.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - DAY

Two calves stare with worry as BOB takes a bath in the broad water tank. BOB bends over to rinse soap from his hair and then shakes water like a hound. Then he notices an amused DICK LIDDIL standing as close as a tailor.

BOB
How long you been there?

DICK
Just now arrived. Did I miss much?

BOB
Not unless you've never seen a man wash his dirty carcass before.

DICK
You've got a big Pecker for being such a little squirrel.

BOB
Is that what you come over here to see?

DICK bends for the towel and some of the good nature slides from his face.

DICK
Your brother said Jesse kept you in Kansas City some extra days. What was the reason?

Bob rubs his hair wild.

BOB
Well, I'm not at liberty to say exactly. I will confess we had an adventure or two, the like of which you'll never experience, but as for details and whatnot, that would be confidential.

BOB straddles the tank and surrounds himself with the towel.

DICK
Let me ask you this: did Jesse mention that me and Cummins were in cahoots?

BOB
Is that so?

DICK
Oh dear. I've went on and said too much.

BOB
Who else is partners with you two?

DICK
You'll just go and squawk about it to Jesse.

BOB
Ed Miller?

DICK
He'll cut our throats if he finds out. You don't know him like I do. You do Jesse dirt, you connive behind his back, he'll come after you with a cleaver.

BOB
He can be spiteful, can he?

DICK
Ho. You're darn tootin'.

BOB
Don't see why he'd give a dang since he and Frank've called it quits and scattered the James gang hither and yon.

DICK studies BOB but sees neither cunning nor deception.

DICK
Boy, you really are as slow as peach mold, you know that? Tucker Bassham's already gone for ten years and whiskyhead Ryan's in jail; soon as one or the other feels the urge he can give the government all he knows about Jesse and then go out on the street scot-free. Jesse don't want us giving ourselves up and he don't want us getting caught and he don't want us gathering loot except if he's in charge.

BOB rolls his eyes in exasperation, then clutches the towel around him and reaches down for his holster. DICK pins it with his boot.

DICK
Let me carry your six-gun for you, Bob.

BOB
All right.

They take no more than two strides towards the house before DICK has insisted the revolver under the towel with the barrel against BOB'S scrotum.

DICK
You and me, we horse around and josh each other with lies and tomfoolery, but now and then we need to get down to brass tacks. Which is: you so much as mention my name to Jesse, I'll find out about it, you better believe that. And then I'll look you up, I'll knock on your door, and I will be as mad as a hornet, I will be *hot*.

BOB
You be careful with that iron.

DICK
You know where I stand on these matters and that's all there is to it. We can be friendly as pigs from now on.

BOB
Could be I'll never see Jesse again.

DICK draws the screen door wide for Bob and then restricts it with his shoulders as he pries his boots off with the bootjack.

DICK
Oh no. I've got a hunch about it. Jesse will come courtin' Ed and Jim and me, and he'll find himself in the neighborhood and call on them two Ford brothers. Jesse don't miss much. He has a sixth sense.

INT. MARTHA'S BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAY

BOB dresses in his new clothes, selected according to Jesse's sartorial preferences. But while these clothes might suit Jesse James they do not particularly suit ROBERT FORD.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAY.

BOB enters to find CHARLEY and WOOD rooting through his mementoes:

BOB
You two have some nerve!

BOB elbows them aside and begins repacking the shoe-box. Charlie holds up a photograph.

CHARLEY
This ain't Jesse.

BOB
You don't know that.

CHARLEY
Never wore no mustache; never was anywheres *near* a cannon.

WOOD
I can't even calculate what I'm lookin' at.

CHARLEY
Ever since he was a child, Bob's collected whatsoever he could find about the James brothers. Got himself a little museum in this room.

BOB rams the nightstand's door closed. He's humiliated, angry, close to tears:

BOB
Next time you snoop around up here you better strap on a shootin' iron.

CHARLEY
You can see how scared I am.

BOB
You too, Wood Hite. You cross me again and I'll put a bullet through your head.

CHARLEY
Now is that any way to talk?

WOOD pokes BOB onto the bed.

WOOD
(sneers)
You better recollect who my cousin is. You seem to've misremembered that Jesse loves me like the Good Book. You can play like you're a dangerous person at the grocery store, but don't you misremember who you'll be accounting to if I so much as have my feelings hurt.

MARTHA (OFF-SCREEN)
Do I have to yell suwee?

CHARLEY
Why don't everyone make up and be pleasant for once? Why don't we pass the evening like pleasant human beings?

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAY

DICK enters with his coat and bags. MARTHA kisses him on the lips and whispers in his ear.

DICK
Oh, Goodness! Maybe I'll change my mind.

But then WOOD is behind him, jealously bumping him towards the door.

WOOD
Come on.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - DAY

DICK and WOOD take mount their horses and wave goodbye to the FORDS.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, SOUTHWEST KENTUCKY - DAY

They ride sullenly. WOOD reads a penny newspaper four inches from his nose. DICK watches the geography sail by.

EXT. HITE PROPERTY, KENTUCKY - AFTERNOON

DICK and WOOD approach the HITE family home. Two EX-SLAVES thresh corn in a field. A BLACK WOMAN pins laundry on a clothesline.

MRS SARAH HITE stands up from her weeding and excitedly waves. She's pert and pretty.

WOOD
You keep your hands off this one. She's my Daddy's wife.

INT. DINING ROOM, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

Dinner in silence: SARAH sits next to her ancient and emaciated HUSBAND. The atmosphere is becoming strained, so DICK leans over his pot roast:

DICK
You cook this, ma'am?

She shakes her head:

SARAH
I've got a nigger woman.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE raises an ear trumpet and inclines it towards his wife:

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
How's that?

SARAH
Dick asked if I cooked this?

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
Did you?

SARAH
No.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE picks up SARAH'S hand and displays it to the assembled like a greeting card.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
You boys ever seen such dainty nubbins? Sarah's my plumb little plumb.

He grins at her red-faced resentment. DICK looks at his knife and fork.

WOOD
She knew what he was like when she married him.

EXT. PORCH, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

MRS SARAH HITE sits in a rocking chair with her needlework. DICK comes out and leans on the porch rail. Finally, he says:

DICK
I guess we're the night owls, you and me.

She simpers but does not look up.

SARAH
I'm glad.

DICK
Oh? How come?

SARAH
You have a real pleasant disposition; you're interesting to look at; and, I don't know, you sort of make me warm all over.

DICK
I'm what they call a worldling.

SARAH
Well, I knew there had to be a name for it.

DICK
You and the Hite family don't get along, if I'm to trust Wood and his version of the situation.

SARAH
We hate each other like poison, if you want to know the truth. Most of the Hites wouldn't spit on me if I was on fire.

DICK grins:

DICK
They say when a woman catches fire you're supposed to roll her around on the ground and cover her with your body.

Sarah laughs and clamps her mouth.

SARAH
You naughty tease! You tickle me to such an extent that my cheeks are burning up.

WOOD appears at the screen door, scowling, in his night shirt.

WOOD
Isn't it about bedtime?

DICK
I'll just kiss those dainty nubbins.

And, as he does so, SARAH giggles.

INT. HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

DICK follows WOOD up to the second floor bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM, HITE HOMESTEAD - LATER.

DICK is tucked under the bedsheet. He whacks his pillow. He rustles and stirs.

DICK
I drank too much coffee.

He sits up to see WOOD glaring at him from the bunk opposite.

DICK
I need to visit the privy something terrible.

INT. CORRIDOR, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

DICK sneaks down to the master bedroom and pushes the door inward.

DICK'S POV:

MAJOR GEORGE HITE is alone in the bed, puttering a snore.

EXT. PORCH, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

DICK exits, careful not to let the screen door clap behind him.

EXT. LAWN, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

He crosses the lawn to the outhouse in back: An interior candlelight can be seen through each severance and crack. DICK looks around him and then slips inside.

INT. OUTHOUSE, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

SARAH sits with her dress hiked up and collected like laundry. Her eyes are downcast, but she seems less shocked than amused:

SARAH
This is embarrassing.

DICK
You go ahead and do your duty; I don't mind.

SARAH
Well now, I've sort of got stage fright with a strange man in the commode with me.

DICK
You look awful pretty.

SARAH
Do I?

DICK
I've never seen such well-shaped limbs.

She glances fleetingly at the bent pronouncement at his crotch.

SARAH
Is Wood awake?

DICK
Just me.

She considers her knees for a moment and then blows out the candle.

SARAH
I bet you thought I was a lady.

EXT. LAWN, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

DICK exits the outhouse and crosses toward the porch. He has his Navy Colt revolver clutched in his right hand.
A gunshot is heard - A noise like the snare of a saw cuts the air near DICK'S ear - and a chunk of gray bark explodes from the broad ash tree behind him. Dick ducks behind it.

DICK
Wood?

No response.

DICK
You're making this more grievous than you oughta, Wood.

He cocks his Navy Colt with quavering hands.

DICK
Can't we talk about it?

Silence.

DICK
I'll shoot! So help me, I'm scared enough to be real undependable with this Colt.

DICK bends out and WOOD fires a second time.

DICK ducks in reaction but sees WOOD'S flash in the foliage.

DICK raises his gun and fires once. He then snaps the hammer into three detonated cartridges. Panic.

He turns and sees the MAJOR GEORGE HITE and the SERVANTS assembling behind the screen door.

He runs clumsily toward them.

WOOD shoots at his back twice - missing both times.

EXT. PORCH, HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

DICK trips on the stairs and wallops into a slide across the porch. MAJOR GEORGE HITE steps out and Hollers at his son:

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
Here now! Stop this! Wood! I won't have any gunplay on my property! I've told you a thousand times.

WOOD answers with a shot - nailing a dark hole in the windowsill. MAJOR GEORGE HITE stamps and yells:

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
Wood! You listen to me! No more!

WOOD steps out, looks down at his revolver, and clicks the chamber around.

WOOD
That was my last bullet anyways. Something must be wrong with the sight on this thing.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE looks down at the cowering DICK:

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
What's the reason for this ruckus? Huh?

DICK sees SARAH slink over to her husband. He rises.

DICK
Me and Wood, we just had a misunderstanding, is all.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE
You know what? You've worn out your welcome, young fellow.

FADE OUT

EXT. ED MILLER'S CABIN - DUSK

ED MILLER at the screen-door with a gun in his hand and fright in his eyes.

ED MILLER
You come by for a visit?

JESSE (O/S)
You going to let me in or do I have to talk through the screen?

INT. ED MILLER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

JESSE enters. The room is a mess: Mold crusted dishes stacked on the kitchen table; newspapers shucked like corn against the couch; a chair tipped over; a cat on the kitchen cutting board licking something from the sink.

JESSE
You aren't much of a housekeeper, are you?

ED MILLER
You didn't just *happen* by.

JESSE
Why not?

JESSE looks at the gun and MILLER puts it on the kitchen table.

JESSE sits himself down on the ringed rug. He nods toward the sagging couch:

JESSE
Go ahead and take a load off your feet.

MILLER does as instructed. His clothes are wrinkled as crumpled paper, his fingernails are outlined with filth, a corner of his mouth is stained with tobacco juice.

JESSE
You ought to get yourself a wife.

ED MILLER
I was going to ask Martha - Charley's sister? I was going to ask her if she could imagine it, but I guess Wood has plans of his own, and there's always Dick Liddil getting in the way. I've give it some thought.

MILLER can't seem to put his eyes on JESSE. His right foot rapidly taps the floor.

JESSE
Your crops in?

ED MILLER
Don't got much. A garden patch and pasture. I was sick at planting time.

JESSE
How you feeling now?

A fleeting glance at JESSE:

ED MILLER
Why?

JESSE
You're acting queer.

ED MILLER
You and me, we haven't been just real good friends lately. It's not your fault, you understand. You hear talk though.

JESSE
Talk?

ED MILLER
People tell you things.

JESSE
Give me an example.

ED MILLER
Jim Cummins come by. Oh and Jim says - you know those boys got caught for the Blue Cut deal? - Jim says he got word - don't ask me where - that you're planning to kill them.

JESSE
Why would I do that?

MILLER shoots a glance at JESSE'S gun hand and then reestablishes his gaze on the yard.

ED MILLER
It's just talk probably.

JESSE
To shut 'em up?

ED MILLER
Just talk.

JESSE
Cummins say anything else?

ED MILLER
Nope. That was it basically.

JESSE
It don't explain why you're scared.

MILLER looks at him with watery eyes and spit on his mouth, light glinting off the oils on his skin.

ED MILLER
I'm in the same position, you see? I was *petrified* when I saw you ride up!

JESSE
I just happened by, Ed.

ED MILLER
Suppose you heard gossip though. Suppose you heard Jim Cummins come by here. You might've thought we were planning to capture you or Frank and get that reward. Isn't true, but you might've suspected it.

JESSE gets up and jiggles a pants leg over his boot.

JESSE
Haven't heard a lick of gossip lately.

JESSE looks out at the road and at the sky which is pink with sunset. The road he looks down seems never-ending.

JESSE
I'm glad I happened by.

ED MILLER (OFF-SCREEN)
Me too.

JESSE
I want to put your mind at rest.

ED MILLER (OFF-SCREEN)
I've got six hundred dollars stashed away; I don't need any governor's reward.

JESSE
It's the principle of the thing too.

MILLER pulls himself to his feet and sweeps his hand over a plate to shoo away flies.

JESSE
How about if we go for a ride? I could buy you something to eat in town and then be on my way.

EXT. ED MILLER'S CABIN - NIGHT

MILLER saddles his mare as JESSE sits on a gelding with the night falling all around him.

EXT. ROAD, SALINE COUNTY - NIGHT

They head westerly, the horses easing into a graceful lope and then into a walk.

JESSE
You ever count the stars?

MILLER looks overhead at the pinpricks of light.

JESSE
I can't ever get the same number; they keep changing on me.

ED MILLER
I don't even know what a star is exactly.

JESSE
Your body knows; it's your mind that forgot.

MILLER can't get himself to say anything. JESSE pretends a problem with his cinch, slows his horse.

JESSE
You go on ahead, partner. I'll catch up.

MILLER slumps in his saddle, tears forming in his eyes. JESSE gentles his gun from the leather holster and then jogs his horse ahead. MILLER stops on the road but can't persuade himself to drop a hand to his pistol or even to turn around.

JESSE
(rounding him)
You ought to get better at lying.

JESSE trips the hammer and a cartridge ball pounds into MILLER'S cheek, snaps his head to the side and propels his body off the mare so that he wallops onto the road. JESSE gets off his horse and tugs at ED MILLER'S legs, towing the body towards a cluster of Elm trees.

EXT. PADDOCK - DAY

ED MILLER'S MARE browsing riderless in a paddock:

NARRATOR (V/O)
The sitting room conversations were all about Blue Cut that week: the Kansas City newspapers carried front-page articles about the arrests of John Bugler, John Land, and Creed Chapman in shacks near Glendale. Creed Chapman would lose forty-two pounds while imprisoned and John Land was rumored to be so apprehensive about reprisal by Jesse James that he refused to even mention the man's name.

INT. DICK'S BEDROOM, KANSAS CITY - NIGHT.

DICK doesn't know what wakes him. He looks from his sleeping wife (MATTIE) to the light spilling through the bedroom doorway. He seems transfixed by it. A sound begins to build. Hairs stand up on the back of his neck. He retrieves his Navy Colt from under his pillow and slides quietly out of bed.

INT. DICK'S KITCHEN, KANSAS CITY - NIGHT.

DICK enters and almost screams:

JESSE JAMES sits like an apparition at his kitchen table.

JESSE
You want to go for a ride?

EXT. ROAD, OUTSIDE KANSAS CITY - DAWN.

They head their horses through the cold. DICK is suspicious and unnerved.

DICK
Are we going to your place?

JESSE puts his finger inside his cheek and flicks out the last of his tobacco chew.

JESSE
You seen Ed Miller lately?

DICK
Nobody has.

JESSE
Must've gone off to California.

DICK looks at him with perplexity.

JESSE
I got word about you and Wood. You ought to patch things up.

DICK
I'd still like to know where we're going.

JESSE
If you were going to see Jim Cummins, wouldn't you follow this road?

DICK
I guess so.

JESSE
Goddamn it, Dick; use your head.

EXT. BILL FORD'S FARM (ESTABLISHING) - DAY

JESSE and DICK approach the farmhouse.

INT. BILL FORD'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

A 12-year-old boy (ALBERT FORD) stands at the sitting room window and watches the two men climb down from their saddles.

EXT. PORCH, BILL FORD'S FARMHOUSE - DAY.

The boy creaks open the door and comes outside:

ALBERT
Hello.

But he's ignored as JESSE reconnoiters the yard and then gravely ascends the steps. DICK can see past the nervous ALBERT to the kitchen where TWO WOMEN stir clothes in a laundry boiler. JESSE peers into the other rooms.

ALBERT
Are you friends of my Pa's?

JESSE
We're friends of Jim Cummins.

ALBERT
Oh.

ALBERT gains thirty years - becomes sullen.

ALBERT
Well, it so happens he's been gone since August and never said where he gone to.

DICK
I'm Matt Collins.

DICK shakes the boy's hand.

ALBERT
Very happy to meet you.

JESSE clenches the boy's hand and introduces himself.

JESSE
Dick Turpin.

ALBERT
Pleased to make your acquaintance.

JESSE smiles around the cigar but stalls the shake and crushes ALBERT'S hand until the boy winces. ALBERT is about to cry out when JESSE clamps his hand over the boy's mouth and yanks him into the yard. DICK softly shuts the mahogany door.

EXT. YARD, BILL FORD'S FARM - DAY

JESSE manhandles the boy toward a red barn stopping to slam ALBERT into a cottonwood tree so that he loses his wind. DICK shambles after them, looking apprehensive and ashamed, checking the road.

INT. BARN, BILL FORD'S FARM - DAY

JESSE throws the boy to the ground and steps a boot onto his throat.

DICK
Come on, Jesse! He's just a kid.

JESSE glowers at DICK for letting his name slip, then returns his attention to the choking boy.

JESSE
He knows where his uncle Jim is and that's gonna make him old pretty soon.

ALBERT brawls and kicks at JESSE.

DICK
Maybe he doesn't know.

JESSE
He knows.

JESSE falls to his knees on the boy's biceps. ALBERT cries out. JESSE clamps the boy's mouth shut.

JESSE
You need to ask and ask sometimes. Sometimes a child won't remember much at first and then it'll all come back. Just tell me about your Uncle Jim is. Where'd he sneak off to; where's he hidin' out?

He twists the boy's ear like a clock wind-up and ALBERT'S body racks wildly, his boots thud the earth. JESSE leans over to examine the injury.

JESSE
My gosh, I believe it's about to tear, sweetie. Just a little more to get her started, then I can rip your ear off like a page from a book.

DICK
Let the kid go.

JESSE
He's lying.

DICK
Jesus; he can't even talk!

JESSE
Where's Jim? (beat) Where's Jim? Where's Jim?
Where's Jim?

DICK
(slapping JESSE'S hat off his head)
Quit it!

JESSE sits back and rubs his hands on his thighs. ALBERT weeps but can't make words. He wipes his nose and eyes and shudders with sobs as he gasps for air. When at last he speaks his voice is scaled like a child's:

ALBERT
You bastard! I don't know where he is and you won't believe me and you never even gave me a chance. You kept my mouth shut! I never know where Jim is or when he comes so leave me alone, get off me, you son of a bitch!
(grunts and bucks under JESSE and shouts:)
Get off!

JESSE rises and ALBERT rolls over crying. DICK walks out in disgust.

EXT. YARD, BILL FORD'S FARM - DAY

DICK walks around the barn to the road, his face splotched crimson with fury. He climbs onto his mount.

When JESSE comes forward, DICK looks away; squints down the road in order to talk.

DICK
I'm worn out Jesse. I cant- My mind's all tangled anyway. Little deals like that just make me feel dirty.

DICK turns to gauge JESSE'S reaction to this and is astonished to see him caved forward into his bay horse, his face flattened into its mane in a grimace of affliction, noiselessly crying.

DICK
You all right, Jesse?

JESSE nuzzles into the horse's hide and mutters words we can't make out.

ALBERT limps toward the Ford house, cupping his left ear and wiping his nose with his sleeve.

DICK
Maybe you better ride on to wherever it is you're living now, and maybe I'll sell this animal and skeedaddle on over to Mrs. Bolton's and, you know, apologize to the Fords; put everything in it's best light and so on.

JESSE scrubs at his eyes. He fumbles his left boot at the stirrup until at last it finds purchase and he swings up.

JESSE
I must be going crazy.

And he rides off without another word.

FADE OUT

EXT. HARBISON FARM - MORNING.

WOOD HITE approaches through the arctic wind. His moustache is jeweled with ice. Snow has made boards of his trousers and sleeves.

He sees ELIAS FORD (BOB & CHARLEY'S ELDER BROTHER) in the distance; throwing up his arm in greeting and pointing him toward the stables.

INT. BARN, HARBISON FARM - MORNING.

WOOD walks his horse inside a stall and throws a moth eaten blanket over it.

EXT. YARD, HARBISON FARM - MORNING.

WOOD walks to the kitchen with WILBUR, who's teetering with a milkcan. (WILBUR is another FORD BROTHER, in between BOB and CHARLEY)

WOOD
How come it's always you who does the chores?

WILBUR
Charley and Bob pay extree to Martha so's they don't have to.

WOOD
Still don't seem fair.

WILBUR
Well.

WILBUR opens the storm door for the man and bangs the milk can inside.

WILBUR
I'd take a rag to my nose if I were you; it's unsightly.

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

MARTHA kneads bread dough on a floured board. IDA stirs a kettle, yawning. WILBUR straddles a chair and MARTHA turns to see WOOD thawing his right ear over the coal lamp's glass chimney.

MARTHA
Look what the cat dragged in.

He rotates his ear to thaw the left ear.

MARTHA
You come from Kentucky?

WOOD squints at her:

WOOD
You mean the news never got this far?

WILBUR
Wood and Dick had a shooting scrape a month or two ago.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

BOB is awake upstairs. The North window is raised and the room is so cold spirits leave him with each exhalation. The sounds of breakfast being prepared below:

MARTHA (OFF-SCREEN)
Cover the kettle, Ida.

Then he hears his sister say:

MARTHA (OFF-SCREEN)
What on earth did you and Dick get into a fracas about?

And he bolts out of bed. He scoots his hand under DICK'S pillow and shakes him:

BOB
Dick!

LIDDIL automatically reaches for the colt revolver but finds it trapped. He looks at BOB'S worried face.

BOB
Wood Hite's downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

MARTHA
I-da! Don't stick your thumb in the cream when you skim it! Goodness sakes!

WILBUR
Dick told me a complete other version of that affray.

WOOD
You mean he's here?

WILBUR
Came in late last night.

WOOD'S chair screeches on the floor as he stands up.

WILBUR
Simmer down.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

DICK cocks his Navy Colt and points it at the closed door. BOB extracts a loaded revolver from CHARLEY'S holster.

MARTHA (OFF-SCREEN)
Don't you boys get into a fracas up there.
I've almost got breakfast cooked.

They listen as WOOD makes a racket on the stairs.

WOOD slams the bedroom door with his boot so that it bashes the wall and CHARLEY jolts up.

DICK fires a shot, missing WOOD and smashing a hole in the doorjamb.

WOOD fires at DICK strewing pillow feathers, and fires a second time as DICK rolls off the mattress.

A terrified BOB cowers next to his bed and clicks back the hammer of his revolver.

WOOD fires a shot through DICK'S thigh; swatting the floorboards and bed sheets with blood.

DICK triggers a shot that snags WOOD'S right arm.

CHARLEY gets out of bed and dives for the windowsill, squirming under the sash.

WOOD shoots at CHARLEY but misses.

EXT. ROOF, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING

CHARLEY slips on the eave and slides off the roof and whumps into a snowbank twelve feet below.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

DICK, in agony, raises his Navy Colt again but the hammer snaps against an empty chamber.

WOOD then switches his pistol to his left hand, steps forward, and takes slow and careful aim at DICK.

It is then that BOB FORD shoots ROBERT WOODSON HITE: The round goes in just next to his eyebrow and makes a small button of red carnage that shuts WOOD'S motor off. WOOD collapses to his knees, his brown eyes

jelly and reason vanishes, and then he falls to the left with a concussion that jostles the room.

DICK looks at BOB with consternation.

BOB walks around to WOOD with sickness in his stomach, an apricot in his throat.

DICK
Is he dead?

BOB is deafened by the gunfire:

BOB
What?

DICK
Is he dead?

WOOD'S chest swells and relaxes. Blood pools wide as a birdbath under his skull.

BOB
He's still sucking air, but I think he's a goner.

INT. 2ND FLOOR CORRIDOOR, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

BOB steps shakily out into the corridor and looks down at MARTHA and ELIAS at the bottom of the stairs.

BOB
(holding it together)
Maybe you oughta come up and wish him well on his journey.

Blood creeps away from WOOD and drools into board cracks. BOB stares at it as the stairs creak.

BOB
(little boy lost)
He's losing all his stuffing.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MORNING.

MARTHA bumps past BOB, removes her apron, and carefully wads it under the exit wound. ELIAS squats next to her.

ELIAS
You were a good fellow, Wood. You talked kindly and you took care of your horse and you always pulled your own weight.

MARTHA
I hope the pain isn't frightful, Wood. I'd fetch something for you to drink but I'm afraid it'd just make you choke.
(beat)

Little Ida's going to miss you. So is the rest of the family.

DICK collars his thigh with his hands.

DICK
Hitch my leg up onto the bed so that it won't dispense so easy.

He grits his teeth when ELIAS grips his ankle and sags back with a moan when ELIAS lifts it onto the mattress.

BOB steps into the room and stands over WOOD.

BOB
Just in case you never noticed. It was me who shot you. I don't harbor any ill feelings toward you, I was just scared and looking out for my own well-being.

A finger ticks on WOOD'S left hand and BOB jumps back an inch before recovering his composure.

BOB
You've done a gallant job of dying so far and have nothing whatsoever to be ashamed about.

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - AFTERNOON.

CHARLIE sits with his foot propped up on a chair, his sprained ankle as round as a melon.

CHARLEY
One thing's settled: can't take him into Richmond.

WILBUR
How come?

CHARLEY
One: the sheriff will put Bob in jail. And two: Jesse will find out his cousin Wood's been shot in our house and that'll be the end for each and every one of us.

IDA comes inside from the root cellar with vegetable jars. She turns to her weeping mother.

IDA
Does Uncle Bob like okra, Momma?

MARTHA
Can't you see him standing there? Why don't you find out for yourself?

BOB loiters with the shell of the bullet, sniffing the burned gunpowder in it.

BOB
She's afraid of me, Martha.
(Beat)
You all are.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DUSK.

WOOD'S corpse, now naked, is laid out on BOB'S twin bed. DICK'S lips move as he reads a yellow book. BOB enters. DICK doesn't raise his eyes.

DICK
He ain't disappeared if that's what you were hoping.

BOB
What chapter are you on?

DICK
She's seen some young swell and got herself all agitated.

BOB
How's your leg?

DICK
Full of torment, Bob. Thanks for asking.

BOB sets his tin plate down and lowers himself onto DICK'S bed. He examines the excavation in WOOD'S skull.

BOB
I ought to feel sorry but I don't. I'm just glad it's Wood who's dead and not me.

DICK closes the book on his index finger. He looks at BOB.

DICK
You and me, we'll have to sit down and talk a few things over. Circumstances have changed.
(nods to WOOD)
He'll cut our throats if he finds out. You don't know Jesse like I do. He'll kill us in our sleep.

BOB sighs; the gravity of his situation sinking in on him. Then ELIAS is standing in the doorway with a moth eaten blanket.

ELIAS
Ready?

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DUSK.

ELIAS and BOB tow the body down the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DUSK.

CHARLEY and WILBUR solemnly rise from their chairs as WOOD is carried out. IDA covers her face with her palms and MARTHA turns to the stove.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - DUSK.

Snow falls around BOB and ELIAS as they struggle with their cumbersome load.

EXT. RAVINE, HARBISON FARM - DUSK.

WOOD'S naked body is rolled into a snow filled ravine. The brothers begin kick clods of earth down onto the body.

ELIAS (OVER)
Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

EXT. SLOPE ABOVE RAVINE, HARBISON FARM - LATER.

ELIAS stands with hat at his chest, petitioning BOB with his eyes.

BOB
Meek.

ELIAS
Blessed are the meek...

ELIAS pauses and beseeches his brother again.

BOB
For they shall inherit the earth.

FADE OUT

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DUSK.

BOB sits, spooked, in the living room. The clock clunks. A candle blows out.

BOB turns to lock eyes with an apparition at the windowglass: Its JESSE receding back into the darkness.

And then suddenly JESSE is filling up the kitchen, as large and as loud as a beer wagon: Rowdily swatting shoulders and biceps, receiving the other FORD BROTHER'S handshakes.

BOB scuttles up the stairs.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DUSK.

DICK is already hopping one-leggedly toward the closet.

BOB
Why'd he come by, Dick? Does he know about Wood, do you think?

DICK
I can't figure it, Bob. I only know that he doesn't miss very much.

BOB
What should I say about you if he asks?

DICK
Just tell him I'm in K.C. with Mattie.

Dick swaddles himself in yanked-down petticoats and crinolines as BOB closes the closet door.

INT. KITCHEN, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - SOON AFTER.

BOB shies into the kitchen.

JESSE
Why, it's the kid!

BOB
How's everything?

JESSE ignores question and takes off his hat and coat. No one talks as JESSE moves - it's as if his acts are miracles of invention wondrous to behold.

JESSE
I never take off my gunbelt.

WILBUR
Good thinking.

JESSE walks back to his coffee and CHARLEY hitches aside.

JESSE
Hurt your leg?

CHARLEY
I slipped off the roof and smacked down into a snowbank like a ton of stupidness. One second I'm screaming, 'Whoa, Nelly!' and the next second, poof! I'm neck deep in snow.

JESSE
The roof? Whatever possessed you to climb the roof in December?

CHARLEY loses his smile and sees the criticism in BOB'S expression.

CHARLEY
(stammering)
There was a kite- what am I saying? There was a cat. A cat was on the roof and I went after him. A tom cat. Yowling and whatall; and I slipped.

CHARLIE rubs his eye and coughs into his fist.

JESSE
I thought maybe your clubfoot was gaining on ya.

WILBUR and CHARLEY guffaw as if this is funny. MARTHA carries a bowl of ham hocks to the table.

BOB
Dick was here for a little bit and then he went on to Kansas City to be with his wife.

JESSE gives BOB a look and then pretends he hasn't heard. He begins to tickle IDA'S side and stomach, saying 'Kootchy Kootch' until the girl is sore with giggles, and the fun is over.

MARTHA
Oh, quit it, you two.

CHARLEY casts about anxiously for something to say.

CHARLEY
Here's a cute story, Jess. Bobby was - what - eleven or twelve? And you were by far his most admired personage. He couldn't get enough. He practically ate those newspaper stories up. It was Jesse this, Jesse that, from sunrise to sunset.

JESSE
Fascinating.

CHARLEY
No; there's more. This is cute. We're at supper and Bob asks, 'You know what size boot Jesse wears?'

BOB
Jesse doesn't care about this, Charley.

CHARLEY
Shush now, Bob. Let me tell it. Bob says, he says 'You know what size boot Jesse wears? Six and a half,' He says, 'Ain't that a dinky little boot for a man five feet eight inches tall?' Well, I decide to josh him a little, you know, so I said, 'He doesn't have toes, is why.'

BOB
Really stupid.

CHARLEY
Then my momma pipes up and says, 'He what?' and I'm not letting on. I say, 'He was dangling his feet off a culvert and a catfish nibbled his toes off.' Well, Bob taxed himself trying to picture it until Momma let on that I was playing him the fool. And Bob says - I want to get this right. What was it exactly you said, Bob?

BOB
(reluctant)
I said, 'If they'd been catfish he'd a drilled them with his forty-four.'

CHARLEY laughs and claps his hands.

CHARLEY
Yep, that's the exact words, exactly!

Jesse looks at BOB without comment.

BOB
It'd be a good joke if it was funny.

CHARLEY
You've got to picture it though. Bob saying you would've shot them catfish, then smiling in every direction, real satisfied with himself. Oh! And you know what he said next? He said, 'You *need* your toes.'

WILBUR
How'd I miss this? Where was I?

CHARLEY
You *need* your toes.

JESSE
'Course you do.

CHARLEY
Isn't that a cute story?

JESSE suppresses his opinion. He regards BOB in a way that implies the sight is disappointing. He skewers a cigar with the tine of his fork.

JESSE
Give me some other conversations, Bob.

BOB
(reluctant)
You know how children are.

JESSE
It'd be cheery to hear what you fancied about me. It might make me laugh and forget my cares and woes.

BOB
I can't recall much of any consequence.

CHARLEY
I got one. This one's about as crackerjack as the one about your toes.

BOB
Which?

CHARLEY
About how much you and Jesse have in common.

JESSE
Why don't *you* tell it, Bob; if you remember.

BOB
Well, if you'll pardon my saying so, it is interesting, the many ways you and I overlap and whatnot. You begin with our Daddies. Your daddy was a pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church; my daddy was pastor of a church at Excelsior Springs. You're the youngest of the three James boys; I'm the youngest of the five Ford boys. You had twins as sons, I have twins as sisters. Between Charley and me, is another brother, Wilbur here (with six letters in his name); between Frank and you was a brother, Robert, also with six letters. Robert, of course, is my Christian name. You have blue eyes; I have blue eyes. You're five feet eight inches tall. I'm five feet eight inches tall. Oh me, I must've had a list as long as your nightshirt when I was twelve, but I've lost some curiosities over the years.

JESSE is as still as a photograph. Smoke spirals from his cigar in a line and then squiggles above him like sloppy handwriting; but his eyes are active, cagey, calculating. He comes carefully to life and taps ashes into his coffee cup.

JESSE
Did I ever mention that scalawag George Shepherd to y'all?

He reaches over and grips BOB'S forearm in apology while saying:

JESSE (CONT'D)
George was one of Quantrill's lieutenants and he gave me a story like Bob's, is why I thought of him, giving me everything we had in common and so on, just so he could join the gang. How could I know he had a grudge against me and was lying to get on my good side? I said 'Come aboard, George. Glad to have ya,' George thought he was pretty smart. 'Cept he wasn't. He rode into camp one morning and about twenty guns opened up on him. But he only had one eye - and you need *two* eyes to get Jesse.

BOB and WILBUR laugh for a suitable period of time, and JESSE laughs until tears come out of his eyes.

BOB
You oughtn't think of me like you do George Shepherd.

JESSE
You just brought him to mind.

BOB
It's not very flattering.

MARTHA waitresses around them collecting cups and saucers.

JESSE
Good eating, Martha.

MARTHA
Glad you liked it.

BOB
How come George had a grudge against you?

JESSE
Hmmm?

BOB
You said George Shepherd had a grudge against you and I've just been wondering what it was?

JESSE
Oh. George asked me to protect this nephew of his during the war and it so happens the kid had five thousand dollars on him. The kid winds up killed, and all the money swiped from him, and when George was in prison someone whispers to him it was Jesse James slit the boy's throat.

CHARLEY
Just mean gossip, was it?

JESSE
Bob's the expert; put it to him.

BOB rises from the table like a stamping boy in a snit.

JESSE
I've make him cranky.

WILBUR snickers.

BOB
I've been through this before, is all. Once people get around to making fun of me, they just don't ever let up.

MARTHA
Someone's speaking awful fresh over there!

BOB is forced to walk past JESSE to get to the main room. JESSE kicks a leg across BOB'S path, clouting the floorboards with his boot. BOB glances down at his bogus grin - the suggestion of malice beneath his antics.

JESSE
I don't want you to skip off to your room and pout without knowing why I dropped by for this visit.

BOB
I suppose you're going to tell us how sorry you are that you had to slap my cousin Albert around.

Such great heat seems to come then from JESSE'S eyes that BOB glances away as if from sunlight, but in a second the man cools and says:

JESSE
I come to ask one of you two Fords to ride with me on a journey or two. I guess we've agreed it ought to be Charley; you've been acting sort of testy.

BOB stands pale and silent. Then he steps around JESSE'S boot and calmly climbs the stairs to the upper room.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - NIGHT.

BOB enters and carefully shuts the door. DICK shoves open the closet door with his toe and looks out at BOB.

DICK
I'd say that was really stupid.

EXT. SAMUEL'S FARM, KEARNEY (ESTABLISHING) - NIGHT.

JESSE and CHARLEY approach on horseback.

EXT. PORCH, SAMUEL'S FARMHOUSE, KEARNEY - NIGHT.

ZERELDA SAMUELS (Jesse's mother) is in the doorway waiting for them.

ZERELDA
You're Charley Ford.

CHARLEY
Yes ma'am you've seen me once or twice with Johnny.

ZERELDA
I got a letter from George Hite. Hasn't seen hide nor hair of him.

JESSE squints at CHARLEY.

JESSE
And you say you haven't seen Wood?

CHARLEY
Can't imagine where he could be.

INT. KITCHEN, SAMUEL'S FARMHOUSE, KEARNEY - NIGHT.

CHARLEY is woken by JESSE:

JESSE
You finished with your sleeping?

CHARLEY sits up from his bedroll:

CHARLEY
I could use one or two more hours if it's no trouble. I can't operate on less than five. I run into walls and fence posts.

JESSE
I've been holding a discussion with myself over if I ought to tell you this or no. My good side won out and, well, I'd like to make a clean breast of things.

CHARLEY
My mind is cobwebby yet, is the only drawback.

JESSE crosses close.

JESSE
Can you hear me when I whisper this low?

CHARLEY
Just barely.

JESSE
You knew I went to Kentucky?

CHARLEY
Yes.

JESSE
I come back through Saline County and thought to myself, 'Why not stop by and see Ed Miller?' So I do and things aren't to my satisfaction at all. Ed's got himself worked up over something and I can tell he's lying like a rug and I say to myself, 'Enough's enough!' and I say to Ed, 'Come on, Ed; let's go for a ride.' Do you understand what I'm saying?

CHARLEY
Going for a ride is like giving him what-for.

JESSE
Exactly. Ed and Jesse, they argued on the road and when push came to shove, Jesse shot and killed him.

CHARLEY
Jesse did.

JESSE
You've got it.

CHARLEY
You.

JESSE pats CHARLEY'S knee.

JESSE
So you see? Your cousin got off easy. I was only playing with Albert.

CHARLEY
I've made him squeal once or twice myself. I'm just not as thorough as you are.

JESSE
You want to swap a tale with me now?

CHARLEY
(sudden fright)
I don't get your meaning.

JESSE
If you've got something to confess in exchange, it seems to me it'd only be right for you to spit it out now.
(beat)
About Wood Hite, for example.

CHARLEY
I've been saying over and over again I can't figure out where he's gone. I'm not going to change my story just to have something to spit.

JESSE
Why was your brother so agitated?

CHARLEY
Which?

JESSE
Bob.

CHARLEY
It's just his way. He's antsy.

JESSE retreats. Sits in a chair.

JESSE
You can go back to sleep now.

CHARLEY
You got *me* agitated now: you see?

JESSE
Just ain't no peace with Jesse around. You ought to pity my poor wife.

CHARLEY
Ed Miller was a good friend of mine. He introduced me to you at that one poker game. I'm a little angry with you, if you want the God's honest truth.

JESSE crosses his ankles and shuts his eyes. He pushes his hands deep into his pockets.

JESSE
You ought to pity me too.

FADE OUT

EXT. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT, KANSAS CITY - DAY.

BOB walks through a street of mud and slush and manure. He cuts between two surreys and enters the Times Building.

INT. HENRY CRAIG'S OFFICE, TIMES BUILDING - DAY.

BOB stands in a room that's full of bookcases housing Kansas and Missouri statutes. The door creaks and he turns to see a stern man in his late forties:

HENRY CRAIG
My assistant mentioned something about you and the James gang.

BOB
Yes sir. I want to bring them to justice.

HENRY CRAIG
The James gang.

BOB doesn't react to his skepticism. Craig takes a seat behind his desk and sighs.

HENRY CRAIG
How do you know the James brothers?

BOB
Did I say that I did?

HENRY CRAIG
Do you spy on them?

BOB
You'll excuse me for saying so, but isn't what matters the fact that I can round these culprits up?

HENRY CRAIG
I get told that once a week, and they're still uncaught. You can see how I'd be skeptical.

BOB lowers into a mahogany chair and admires the sculptured armrests.

BOB
Just lately?

HENRY CRAIG
Just lately what?

BOB
Anybody come to you just lately saying he could bring in one or two of the James gang?

HENRY CRAIG
You've got to give me something. I don't even know your name.

BOB
It's Bob.

HENRY CRAIG
Just Bob?

BOB
Right now, yes; for the time being.

HENRY CRAIG
Do you know where Jesse's living?

BOB
He was in Kansas City.

HENRY CRAIG
(incredulous)
You're pulling my leg.

BOB
Over on Woodland Avenue; and then Troost. He's moved again though.

CRAIG inscribes something in the journal and BOB walks over to study the entry.

BOB
Does the name Bob Ford mean anything to you?

CRAIG dips his quill pen in the ink bottle:

HENRY CRAIG
Is that your actual name or your alias?

BOB
Actual.

BOB watches his name recorded in CRAIG'S elegant calligraphy.

BOB
Pretty soon all America will know who Bob Ford is.

EXT. WOODS SURROUNDING HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAWN.

An ARMED POSSE crunch through the snow on foot, approaching the Harbison farm.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAWN.

Through the window, BOB sees 12 ARMED MEN coming out of the woods, as rounded over as hedgehogs. He swats at the sleeping DICK LIDDIL'S foot.

BOB
Dick!

Dick inclines on his elbow and slants over just enough to see the MEN wading through a knee-deep snowdrift. He bolts from the bed to his clothes.

DICK
Who is it?

BOB
I saw a tin star on someone's pocket; that's all the information I need.

DICK
God damn that Mattie anyhow.

A big voice is heard coming from the yard:

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE (OFF-SCREEN)
Jesse!

DICK
How do I find the attic?

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE (OFF-SCREEN CONT'D)
We know you're in there! Come outside with your hands up!

EXT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAWN.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE has his mouth bracketed with his mittens. He's surrounded by CRAIG and the DEPUTIES.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
You boys are cornered! If you know what's good for you, you'll come out peaceably and no one will get shot up!

The kitchen door is pushed open and the MEN all crouch down. BOB calls out:

BOB (OFF-SCREEN)
Don't shoot!

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
Come on out and show yourself!

BOB steps out with a smirk.

BOB
If this isn't a surprise!

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
That's how we intended it.

INT. 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM, HARBISON HOMESTEAD - SOON AFTER.

The POSSE are gathered in the room. BOB and MARTHA watch as TIMBERLAKE whams the ceiling cover and points his revolver into the crawl space.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
You there! Give yourself up!

DICK climbs down. He is handcuffed.

HENRY CRAIG
Andrew James Liddil, this is a warrant for your arrest for the murder of William Westfall and participation in the Winston train robbery on the 15th of July, 1881.

FADE OUT

EXT. KANSAS CITY - DAY.

BOB pilots a sleigh pulled by two horses. He approaches the St. James Hotel.

INT. ST. JAMES HOTEL - DAY

BOB strolls the purple carpet of the lobby. It's a world of luxury so far unseen in the film. A world which BOB seems out of place in, but to which he craves entry. He tugs off a mitten with his teeth and regards a sign announcing 'The Craig Rifles Ball.'

INT. HENRY CRAIG'S SUITE, ST. JAMES HOTEL - DAY

HENRY CRAIG is in a wood and tin bathtub that's as narrow as a coffin. He hears a knock at the door.

HENRY CRAIG
Come in.

BOB sidles inside like a cat.

HENRY CRAIG
Didn't expect you to make it.

BOB seats himself in a chair and slides his bowler hat beneath it.

BOB
I couldn't pass up meeting the Governor. Me and him've got some important matters to take up.

CRAIG gives him an intolerant glance and then nods towards a whisky bottle:

HENRY CRAIG
How about some roockus juice?

BOB
(shakes his head)
Doesn't take more than a sip to make me want to bite off my own nose.

CRAIG sloshes messily out of the tub and refills his glass.

HENRY CRAIG
Well, this is my day! Here's to the Craig Rifles and to the great man who leads them so magnificently.

BOB
Can I climb into that bathwater? I think I caught a chill on my way here.

HENRY CRAIG
Go ahead.

BOB strips and sinks into the tub with a groan.

HENRY CRAIG
There's something real seldom about you, Bob.

INT. DINING ROOM, HENRY CRAIG'S SUITE, ST. JAMES HOTEL - DAY

BOB comes out just as two WAITERS trolly in a meal cart. He is shocked to see DICK LIDDIL sitting at the dining table with HENRY CRAIG and the Kansas City POLICEMEN. DICK laughs at BOB'S discomfort.

DICK
Well, well, well. Aren't you just full of surprises.

BOB
They're going to love a pretty boy like you in the penitentiary. You won't never be lonely again.

DICK
Oh, they don't give a damn about me. It's Frank and Jesse they want.

BOB sits down to carrots and rare steak. BOB cuts into his meat and considers the other men's plates:

BOB
Is your cow still moving?

DICK
Just singed it a little did they?

BOB
I've seen critters worse off than this get well.

HENRY CRAIG
You're not going to be complaining all evening, are you?

BOB
Me? I'm happy, Henry! It's the Craig Rifles Ball! It's your night.

HENRY CRAIG
Don't give the Governor your smart aleck talk.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM, ST. JAMES HOTEL - NIGHT

GOVENOR CRITTENDEN speaks to a large crowd of GENTLEMEN in tails and LADIES in satin gowns.

CRITTENDEN
I deem it a great privilege on this glorious occasion to recognize publicly the intelligent and efficient assistance that Captain Henry Craig has thus far provided the State of Missouri and myself in our joint quest to extirpate the James band from Jackson County. The task Henry Craig has assumed requires fearless courage, extraordinary vigilance, and an unerring selection of instrumentalities.

BOB lingers against a pillar on the fringes.

BOB
(mutters to himself)
You're not so great.

A WOMAN nearby glares at the comment.

CRITTENDEN
My wife has just signaled that I should leave well enough alone, so I'll leave you all with the wish for an enjoyable evening and with the hope that I may have the pleasure of meeting each of you before this celebration is ended.

LATER:

BOB jostles through the crowd, insinuating himself closer to CRITTENDEN. He raises his hand in a juvenile wave and is about to give his name when he's grasped by two POLICEMEN. They clamp his mouth shut and sock him in the groin. He collapses in agony.

INT. CORRIDOR, ST. JAMES HOTEL - SOON AFTER

The POLICEMEN shove BOB against a mahogany pillar. CRAIG is with them.

HENRY CRAIG
You're more trouble than you're worth.

BOB
I was just going to say hello.

HENRY CRAIG
That isn't why you're here. Get upstairs now and see if you can't keep your identity secret.

INT. HENRY CRAIG'S SUITE, ST. JAMES HOTEL - SOON AFTER

BOB enters, looking disheveled. DICK, guarded by TWO KANSAS CITY POLICEMEN, looks over the top of his paper and smiles.

DICK
How was the party?

INT. CRITTENDEN'S SUITE, ST. JAMES HOTEL - NIGHT

CRITTENDEN receives them in a red silk robe and directs them towards wingback chairs:

CRITTENDEN
My wife's asleep in the next room, so let's speak as quietly as we can.

CRITTENDEN settles himself into a settee and his eyes glitter as he regards the two strangers:

CRITTENDEN
You're Dick little.

DICK
Liddil.

CRITTENDEN
I beg your pardon?

DICK
I spell it with two d's.

HENRY CRAIG
He's given us a confession but so far the newspapers haven't caught onto it. You've guaranteed him a conditional pardon and amnesty for his robberies.

CRITTENDEN
You're Robert Ford?

BOB grins, but can't think of anything to say.

CRITTENDEN
How old are you, Bob?

BOB
Twenty.

CRITTENDEN
Did you surrender to Sheriff Timberlake as well?

HENRY CRAIG
It was his brother Charley who was in the James Gang. We couldn't find anything on Bob. He's acting in the capacity of a private detective.

CRITTENDEN
I see.

CRITTENDEN pours tea.

CRITTENDEN
Jesse James sent me a telegram last month, saying he was going to kill me if he had to wreck a train to do it. He said that once I was in his hands he was going to cut my heart out and eat in strips like it was bacon.
(beat)
I'm going to wreck his train first.

BOB emits a scoffing laugh. CRITTENDEN glares at him.

BOB
I'm sorry, Your Excellency. I was thinking of something else.

CRITTENDEN
Jesse James is nothing more than a public outlaw who's made his reputation by stealing whatever he could and by killing whoever got in his way. You'll hear some fools say he's getting back at Republicans and Union men for wrongs his family suffered during the war, but his victims have scarcely ever been selected with reference to their political views.

The GOVERNOR'S WIFE moans in the other room. CRITTENDEN tempers his voice.

CRITTENDEN
I'm saying his sins will soon find him out. I'm saying his cup of iniquity is full. I'm saying Jesse James is a desperate case and may require a desperate remedy.

DICK looks to BOB to respond - but sees that the boy is overpowered by the situation, so he responds for him:

DICK
You've got the right man for the job.

FADE OUT

EXT. COUNTRY SIDE, SOMEWHERE IN NEBRASKA - DAY

FOUL WEATHER.

JESSE (O/S)
You ever consider suicide?

CHARLEY and JESSE appear through the grey air:

CHARLEY
Can't say that I have. There was always something else I wanted to do. Or my predicaments changed or I saw my hardships from a different slant; you know all what can happen. It never seemed respectable.

JESSE trots his mount forward:

JESSE
I'll tell you one thing that's certain; you won't fight dying once you've peeked over to the other side; you'll no more want to go back to your body than you'd want to spoon up your own puke.

JESSE vanishes again; leaving CHARLEY'S motor to work in the silence:

CHARLEY
(calling after him)
Since we're looking to rob banks, I was wondering if I could go so far as to recommend we add another feller to the gang and sort of see if we couldn't come out of our next job alive.

JESSE, in his cloud, seems transfixed by his saddle stirrup.

CHARLEY (OFF-SCREEN)
Bob wanted to know could he ride with us next time we took on a savings bank or a railroad.

CHARLEY continues hopefully:

CHARLEY
Bob isn't much more than a boy to most appearances, but there's about two tons of sand in him and he'll stand with his shooter when that's what's called for. And he's smart too - he's about as intricate as they come.

JESSE materializes, suddenly vivid against the snow:

JESSE
You're forgetting that I've already met the kid.

CHARLEY
He surely thinks highly of you.

JESSE
All America thinks highly of me.

CHARLEY
Still. It's not like you've got two million names you can snatch out of a sock whenever you need a third man. I mean, who else is there that isn't already in jail?

JESSE sighs:

JESSE
You're going to try and wear me down on this, aren't you.

CHARLEY
(smiles)
That was my main intention.

The two men disappear again into the grey air.

NARRATOR (V/O)
A note was mailed to Bob Ford with the news that Jesse and Charley would come to Ray County within the next few weeks. Henry Craig enjoined him to return to Richmond and await the arrival of the two.

INT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE, RICHMOND - DAY

BOB is busy with CUSTOMERS. SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE enters, prowls the store once, and then slips into the storeroom.

INT. STOREROOM, ELIAS' GROCERY STORE, RICHMOND - DAY

TIMBERLAKE smokes. BOB enters.

BOB
Haven't seen any sign of him.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
Do you know where he's living?

BOB
No.

TIMBERLAKE sighs.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
I can't guess how he does it, but he's always knowledgeable about what's going on. He'll know you've been with me. You ought to take that for granted. And he'll kill you if he gets the chance.

BOB scratches at his neck and looks away.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
You willing to risk that?

BOB
Yes I am.

BOB fastens his eyes on TIMBERLAKE and all the ingratiation is gone from his face; only longing and misery remain:

BOB
I've been a nobody all my life. I was the baby; I was the one they made the promises to that they never kept. And ever since I can recall it, Jesse James has been as big as a tree. I'm prepared for this, Jim. And I'm going to accomplish it. I know I won't get but this one opportunity and you can bet your life I'm not going to spoil it.

TIMBERLAKE stands and grinds out his cigarette.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
Capture him if you can when he first comes to meet you. If you can't do it, wait for your chance. Don't allow yourself to be found alone with him. And don't let him get behind you.

TIMBERLAKE exits through the loading door.

BOB remains standing there.

INT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE, RICHMOND - ANOTHER DAY

BOB stands on a wooden stool, stacking ketchup bottles, in his clerk's apron. The afternoon sun blazes behind JESSE like a halo:

JESSE
You've been chosen.

BOB swivels and nearly slips. The color has leached from his face.

BOB
What do you mean?

JESSE
Your brother said that you wanted to join us. But maybe you like this grocery store more than you said you did.

BOB looks for a clue from CHARLEY but his brother is fixed in the store's entrance, smoking a cigarette. BOB counterfeits bravado:

BOB
I'll walk out of this crackerbox without so much as a fare-thee-well. This piddly work is beneath me.

He takes off his apron by way of illustration. JESSE smiles.

JESSE
So you missed me?

BOB
I've been crying myself to sleep every night.

BOB places a note on the counter that reads, 'Gone fishing'. JESSE rings open the cash register and finds himself impressed:

JESSE
Good morning.

EXT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE, RICHMOND - DAY

BOB comes outside with carrots for the horses. CHARLEY is already in the saddle:

CHARLEY
Don't let him see us so much as wink at each other. He's suspicious as a danged coyote, and he don't trust you one iota.

BOB
I guess that makes us even.

CHARLEY
He's already put way Ed Miller. Said so like it was something piddly he'd done.

The talk ceases when JESSE comes out. JESSE corrects the crease in his black fedora and slips his boot into the stirrup. HE climbs into the saddle and hooks his horse around:

EXT. ROAD TO ST. JOSEPH - NIGHT.

They ride through a cold rain. In the distance they spot a church and head towards it.

INT. LUTHERAN CHURCH - NIGHT

JESSE throws his greatcoat on a pew and lights an altar candle that he carries into the sanctuary.

BOB kicks his bedroll flat on the floor and says to CHARLEY:

BOB
If we're ever alone for more than a minute, I'd like a chance to speak to you further.

LATER:

BOB wakes and sits up. His brother is asleep.

JESSE is curled over the Bible like a monk.

BOB wanders over to him and sidles into the pew.

JESSE
Go to the good book when you're sore distressed and your soul will be comforted.

BOB studies JESSE. Beat.

BOB
You ever give your past life any thought?

JESSE
I don't get your meaning.

BOB
Do you every give any thought to the men you've killed?

JESSE shuts the book and rubs a thumb across the two gold words on the black cover. Rainfall is the only noise.

JESSE
I've been forgiven for all that.

BOB
You might've had a good reason for killing them. I don't know. I'm just saying it must've been like a nightmare for them, and maybe it is for you too, right now.

JESSE
I've already been forgiven.

He blows out the candle.

EXT. CEMETERY, LUTHERAN CHURCH - DAY

CHARLEY sits on a gravestone engraved with the words 'GONE TO GREATNESS.' BOB ambles up to him with his palms cupping his elbows.

BOB
They gave me ten days.

CHARLEY
For what?

BOB
Arresting him.

CHARLEY
You and me?

BOB
It's going to happen one way or another. It's going to happen, Charley; and it might as well be us who get rich on it.

CHARLEY
Nobody's going to get Jesse if he's still live enough to go for his gun. He can kill ya with every hand.

BOB
I'll go alone then.

CHARLEY looks at him disparagingly.

CHARLEY
And besides that he's our friend.

BOB
He murdered Ed Miller. He's going to murder Liddil and Cummins if the chance ever comes. Seems to me Jesse's riding from man to man, saying goodbye to the gang. Your friendship could put you under the pansies.

CHARLEY looks away.

CHARLEY
I'll grind it fine in my mind, Bob. I can't go any further than that, right now.

BOB
You'll come around.

CHARLEY
You think it's all made up don't you. You think everything is just yarns and newspaper stories.

It's BOB'S turn to look away.

BOB
He's just a human being.

INT. LUTHERAN CHURCH - DAY

They enter the church and discover a furious JESSE.

JESSE
From now on you two won't go <u>anywhere</u> without me! From now on you'll ask for <u>permission</u>; you'll ask to be <u>excused</u>!

EXT. LAFAYETTE ST, ST JOSEPH - DAY

They approach the rollercoaster of Confusion Hill. BOB looks up the steep ascent to a high skull of land upon which rests the white cottage.

CHARLEY
Jesse finally come up with a place to match his prominence.

JESSE
I could mow down a thousand scalawags with no more than a thousand cartridges. I'll never be surprised by anything again.

EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

JESSE climbs off his saddle and accepts his son in his arms.

INT. KITCHEN, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

BOB and JESSE enter. ZEE JAMES backs from the stove, sees BOB, and winces.

ZEE
You never mentioned Bob would be here.

BOB
Maybe he was saving it as a pleasant surprise.

MARY is submerged in the woman's skirt, glowering at BOB. ZEE combs the girl's hair.

ZEE
You've got two cousins for company now.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - NIGHT

JESSE, on the sofa, weds his fingers over his stomach and closes his eyes.

JESSE
How it will be is we'll leave here next Monday afternoon and ride down to Platte City.

BOB
How far is that from Kansas City?

Something in BOB'S enquiry makes JESSE resistant and he answers around the question:

JESSE
Platte City's thirty miles south. You and me and Charley will sleep in the woods overnight and strike the Wells Bank sometime before the court recesses.

BOB
(a little too insistent)
What time will that be exactly?

JESSE
You don't need to know that.

BOB scrawls on the floorboards with his finger and JESSE arises to a sit.

JESSE
You know I feel comfortable with your brother. Hell, he's ugly as sin and he smells like a skunk and he's so ignorant he couldn't drive nails in the snow, but he's sort of easy to be around. I can't say the same for you, Bob.

BOB
I'm sorry to hear you say that.

JESSE is silent a moment.

JESSE
You know how it is when you're with your girlfriend and the moon is out and you know she wants to be kissed even though she never said so?

BOB
Yeah.

JESSE
You're giving me signs that grieve my soul and make me wonder if your mind's been changed about me.

BOB
What do you want me to do? Swear my good faith on the bible?

CHARLEY enters with the firewood to see JESSE glowering at BOB with great heat in his eyes.

CHARLEY
You two having a spat?

JESSE
I was getting ready to be angry.

JESSE smiles and reaches out to coddle BOB'S neck.

BOB
Sit over here closer, Kid.

BOB vacillates a little, then scooches over, smirking at his brother with shyness. JESSE massages BOB'S neck and shoulders, communicating that all is forgiven.

JESSE
You'll stay with the animals, Charley, and The Kid and I will walk into the bank just before noon. Bob will move the cashier over away from the shotgun under the counter and he'll tell the man to open the vault. They'll finagle about time locks and so on and I'll creep up behind that cashier and cock his chin back like so...

JESSE snaps BOB'S skull back and slashes a skinning knife against his throat. BOB is incapacitated by panic. JESSE is terrifying:

JESSE
I'll say, 'How come an off-scouring of creation like you is still sucking air when so many of mine are in coffins?'

BOB'S eye lolls to the blade.

JESSE
I'll say, 'How'd you reach your twentieth birthday without leaking out all over your clothes?' And if I don't like his attitude, I'll slit that phildoodle so deep he'll flop on the floor like a fish.

Then JESSE retracts the blade and shoves BOB rudely forward. Then his temper abruptly alters and he slaps both knees gleefully, laughing at BOB:

JESSE
I could hear your gears grinding *rrr, rrr, rrr,* and your little motor wondering, 'My Gosh, what's next, what's happening to me?' You were precious to behold, Bob. You were white as spit in a cotton field.

BOB examines his neck with his hand.

BOB
You want to know how that feels? Unpleasant. I honestly can't recommend it.

JESSE
And Charley looked *striken*!

CHARLEY
I *was*!

JESSE
'This is plumb unexpected!' old Charley was thinking, 'This is done ruint my day!'

JESSE laughs and laughs, and when at last the two laugh with him, JESSE adopts a scolding look and slams out of the room.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - NIGHT

JESSE sleeps on the twin bed. BOB on his bedroll.

NARRATOR(V/O)
Jesse slept with Bob in the children's room that night and Bob remained awake. He could see that there was a gun on the nightstand, he could imagine it's cold nickel inside his grip, it's two pound weight reached out and aimed, but he couldn't even maneuver toward it, it was like a name he couldn't remember.

It was if some spell had rendered him meek, infirm, confounded. He could contrive many ways of snaring Jesse; he could invent a thousand deaths; but Bob feared it would always come to this, he would see a chance and then he'd speculate on it's consequences, he would ponder each option and particular and soon the opportunity would pass away.

INT. KITCHEN, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

BOB, with baited breath, watches through the doorway:

JESSE stands naked in a laundry boiler wringing a washcloth over his skull. He's wracked by a coughing fit. He seems old, prematurely decrepit, the scars on his body stand out red as slaughter.

BOB'S hand moves to the granddaddy Colt that's strapped to his thigh. But that's all, he can't bring himself to unsnug the weapon.

After a long beat, JESSE says:

JESSE
Go away.

BOB
It never crossed your mind that I was here and it's been nigh on three minutes at least.

JESSE
You sure of that? Maybe I was fooling you. Maybe we're playing cat and mouse.

BOB
I've never seen you without your guns neither.

JESSE tows a towel off a chair and reveals, almost incidentally, a twelve inch Remington revolver on the seat.

BOB
Isn't no one could sneak up on Jesse James, is the way it used to be.

JESSE
And now you think you know otherwise, maybe that's just what I wanted.

BOB
I'm just making fun is all, you understand. I wouldn't dream of mocking you or causing you any ill feelings.

JESSE
I can't figure it out: do you want to be like me, or do you want to be me?

NARRATOR(V/O)
So it went:

JESSE MONTAGE

JESSE around the house, images scored to the Narrator's voice like music:

NARRATOR (V/O)
Jesse was increasingly cavalier, merry, moody, fey, unpredictable. He was sick with rheums and aches and lung congestions, he tilted against chairs and counters and walls, in cold weather he limped with a cane. His clever mind was often in conflict, insomnia stained his eye sockets like soot. He counteracted the smell of neglected teeth with licorice and candies, he browned his graying hair with dye, he camouflaged his depressions and derangements with masquerades of extreme cordiality, courtesy, and goodwill toward others:

INT. DINING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

ZEE sets down a soup tureen and JESSE winks at BOB:

JESSE
Is this fit to eat or will it just do?

As ZEE retreats into the kitchen JESSE inches the soup bowl under CHARLEY'S elbow and says to BOB:

JESSE
That woman's cooking has always been a scandal. Cut her meat and the whole table moves.

JESSE laughs as CHARLEY stains his sleeve.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - ANOTHER DAY

JESSE hooks CHARLEY'S spurs together while he snores in the sitting room and then screams the man off the couch, so that CHARLEY farcically sprawls.

NARRATOR (V/O)
But even as he jested,

EXT. PORCH, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

JESSE horses with TIM:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
or tickled his boy in the ribs, Jesse would look over at Bob with melancholy eyes, as if the two were meshed in an intimate communication that had little to do with anyone else.

On BOB working at keeping his expression neutral.

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
Bob was certain that the man had unriddled him, had seen through his reasons for coming along, that Jesse could forecast each of Bob's possible moves and inclinations and was only acting the innocent in order to lull Bob into stupid tranquility and miscalculation.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - NIGHT

JESSE sleeps with BOB in the sitting room, a revolver, clutched in his left hand. BOB listens to each insuck of air so he can tell when JESSE'S gone off. Then, he cautiously rolls to a sit and places his feet on the boards. The revolver is cocked with three clicks.

BOB
I need to go to the privy.

JESSE
You think you do but you don't.

BOB obediently returns to bed.

INT. DINING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY.

ZEE is cleaning up. BOB is so skittish, his leg jitters as he sits in his chair. He gets up and rakes his fingers through his hair, describes a circle in the room and reseats himself again. He bites his fingernail. Again his leg begins to jitter.

ZEE
Why are you so antsy?

BOB
It's just this cussed boredom. This sitting around inside the livelong day, getting into your hair, making jailhouse dogs of ourselves.

ZEE
He's gone for months. We sometimes change houses five times in a year. It's gruesome being hunted, Bob. He can stay in his nightshirt all day if he wants; I'm just grateful he's around.

BOB
You can see it's damaged his mind some.

EXT. STREET, DOWNTOWN ST. JOSEPH - DAY

BOB with a shopping list in hand.

NARRATOR(V/O)
Zee took pity on Bob and sent him to town on an errand.

INT. AMERICAN TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DAY

WIDE on BOB, looking isolated and anxious:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
He stood at a desk in the American Telegraph office and scribbled out twenty messages that he might send to Governor Crittenden or Police Commissioner Craig.

BOB confronts another blank page:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
He could be a glib and even grandiloquent speaker, but writing was agony for him: the right words seemed to disappear whenever he grasped a pencil, plus he was hampered by the grim recognition that he really had nothing to say. For Jesse was canny, he was intuitive, he anticipated everything.

INT. SALOON (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

JESSE, CHARLEY and BOB drink. BOB observes JESSE'S constant checking of the world around him:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
He continually looked over his shoulders, he looked into the background with mirrors, he could pick out a whisper on the wind, he could probably read the faltering perfidy in Bob's face.

EXT. STREET, COMMERCIAL DISTRICT, ST. JOSEPH (FLASHBACK) - DAY

(Action as per voice-over)

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
He once numbered the spades on a playing card that skittered across the street a city block away;

EXT. PORCH, HOUSE ON THE HILL (FLASHBACK) - DAY

(Action as per voice-over)

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
- he licked his daughter's cut finger and there wasn't even a scar the next day;

EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL (FLASHBACK) - DAY

(Action as per voice-over)

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
- he wrestled with his son and the two Fords at once one afternoon and rarely even tilted - it was like grappling with a tree.

RAINFALL; AS SEEN THROUGH A WINDOW (FLASHBACK) - DAY

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
When Jesse predicted rain, it rained;

A PLANT GROWS - TIMELAPSE (FLASHBACK) - DAY

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
when he encouraged plants, they grew;

On JESSE, smiling:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
whomever he wished to stir, he astonished.

INT. AMERICAN TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DAY

On the screwed up balls of paper:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
Some of Bob's telegrams were apologies, some were clarifications, still more were prognostications of when the criminal would be 'removed' until finally Bob settled on a coded note to Sheriff Timberlake, providing him with clues about their living situation in St. Joseph and the contemplated robbery in Platte City on the 4th.

BOB watches the TELEGRAPH OPERATOR at work.

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
It took five minutes to code and transmit the note and two hours for Timberlake to receive it but thereafter the sheriff reacted with great speed,

EXT. LIVERY STABLE, KANSAS CITY - DAY

TIMBERLAKE moves down a line of ARMED MEN, counting soundlessly:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
arranging a company of fifty deputies who would ride their horses into two freight cars and surround the Platte City Bank while the James gang was inside.

INT. KANSAS CITY ROUNDHOUSE - DAY

TIMBERLAKE stands with RAILWAY OFFICIALS watching a great engine belch smoke.

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
Timberlake even went so far as to order a Hannibal and St. Joseph locomotive's engine ignited and kept fully steamed in the Kansas City roundhouse so that it could race to Platte City or St. Joseph without delay.

EXT. KANSAS CITY ROUNDHOUSE - DAY

TIMBERLAKE nods his thanks, shakes hands with an OFFICIAL

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
Having satisfied himself that the appropriate steps had been taken,

INT. RESTAURANT, KANSAS CITY - DAY

TIMBERLAKE and CRAIG raise their glasses:

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
the sheriff dined with Commissioner Craig on the night of the 30th and they toasted a victory that they seemed only days away from achieving.

FADE UP:

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

Sunshine is diagonal in the room and curtains flirt in the air. BOB isn't sure what woke him. He pivots in the child's bed and sees JESSE in a spindle chair.

BOB
How long've you been studying me?

JESSE
You're gonna break a lot of hearts.

BOB rolls to a sitting position.

BOB
How do you mean?

JESSE reveals a black box from behind his back and reaches it over to BOB.

JESSE
It's a present.

BOB hefts it.

BOB
Heavy.

JESSE
You going to look inside?

BOB crams a coin into the interstices and twists until the lid releases.

BOB
It's April Fools Day, you know.

JESSE
It isn't a joke.

Inside the box, nestled in red velvet, is a pearl-handled .44 caliber revolver. BOB beams at JESSE.

BOB
Such extravagance!

JESSE
Doesn't that nickel shine though!

BOB
It's more than I could hope for!

BOB clicks the chamber around, cocks and releases the hammer, cocks the hammer again and aims the revolver at a red ball on the floor. Squeezes the trigger.

JESSE
I figured that granddaddy Colt of yours might blow into fragments the next time you squeeze the trigger.

BOB
You might have something there.

ZEE (OFF-SCREEN)
Dave? You ready for supper?

JESSE
Pretty soon, sweetheart.

BOB
I might be too excited to eat.

Jesse smiles broadly and rises from the spindle chair.

JESSE
You know what John Newman Edwards once wrote about me? He said I didn't trust two men in ten thousand and was even cautious around them. The government's sort of run me ragged, you see. I'm going the long way around the barn to say I've been feeling cornered and just plain ornery of late and I'd be pleased if you'd accept the gun as my way of apologizing.

BOB
Heaven knows I'd ornerier if I were in your position.

JESSE
No. I haven't been acting correctly. I can't hardly recognize myself sometimes when I'm greased. I go on journeys out of my body and look at my red hands and my mean face and I wonder about that man who's gone so wrong: Why all that killing and evil behavior? I've been becoming a problem to myself. I figure if I can get you right I'll be just that much closer to me.

BOB looks at the man in bewilderment and can't find the words for an answer, so he says:

BOB
I need to wash my hands if supper's on. The gun's made them feel sort of public.

JESSE
Go ahead.

INT. KITCHEN, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

BOB exits the children's room and smiles meekly at ZEE as he enters the kitchen. He spills pitcher water into a pan and sinks his hands. He listens to JESSE greet his CHILDREN, listens to chairs sliding away from the dining room table and sliding underneath it again. JESSE begins to say grace without him and BOB raises a yellow brick of soap to his nose, smelling its ingredients.

EXT. LAFFAYETTE ST - DAY

JESSE, ZEE, CHARLEY, TIM and MARY, seen from a distance, walking down Confusion Hill.

NARRATOR(V/O)
April second was Palm Sunday and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Howard, their two children, and their cousin Charles Johnson strolled to the Second Presbyterian Church to attend the ten O'clock service.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

(Action as per voice-over.)

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
Bob remained at the cottage and slyly migrated from room to room.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

(Action as per voice-over.)

NARRATOR(V/O CONT'D)
He walked into the master bedroom and inventoried the clothes on the hangers and hooks. He sipped from the water glass on the vanity. He smelled the talcum and lilacs on Jesse's pillowcase. He reclined on the mattress and rolled to his left as Jesse must have rolled to marry with his wife in the evening. His fingers skittered over his ribs to construe the scars where Jesse was twice shot. He manufactured a middle finger that was missing the top two knuckles.
He imagined himself at thirty-four.
He imagined himself in a coffin.
He considered possibilities and everything wonderful that could come true.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - NIGHT

CHARLEY is scrunched close to the wall in his sitting room bed, a pillow muting his mouth. BOB can just barely perceive that his older brother is crying.

BOB
What's the matter?

CHARLEY
Scared.

BOB snuggles closer to CHARLEY and puts an arm around him.

BOB
He isn't going to kill us.

CHARLEY
Yes he is.

BOB looks over his shoulder to check the room and then murmurs in CHARLEY'S ear:

BOB
I'll stay awake so he can't.

CHARLEY rolls to his back and gazes at the ceiling and then looks to his kid brother.

CHARLEY
This is the ninth day, right? And Craig gave you ten? So maybe we'll get surrounded up here or maybe we'll go to the bank and when we run out it'll be fifty guns shooting every whichway at Jesse and who gives a goddamn if the nobody Fords get killed in the bargain?

BOB
You're imagining things.

CHARLEY covers his eyes with his arm, and respirates himself with great calming breaths of air. Quiet comes to the room again and then he says:

CHARLEY
Isn't going to be no Platte City. That's Jesse fooling with us.

BOB slips out of bed and into his clothes.

CHARLEY
What are you doing?

BOB
Go to sleep.

BOB moves through the sitting room, dining room, kitchen, and steps off the wooden porch into the night.
EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL - NIGHT

He covers himself with a tattersall quilt from the clothesline and settles himself on a plain bench. A mangled spoon is in the dirt; a straw doll is in a tin bucket. He hears the screen door creak and clap shut, and JESSE lowers onto the bench like someone who weighs six hundred pounds.

JESSE
So you and me are the nighthawks.

BOB makes no reply.

JESSE
Mrs. Saltzman cut out a garden patch here. The Turners say it was a marvel: rabbit wire, noontime shade, clematis on the bean poles. I've been lazy about my seedlings.

BOB
I don't like to garden; I just like to eat.

JESSE clutches his trousers and cranes his legs into alignment.

JESSE
Maybe I'll nail together a martin box.

He rapidly pounds his knees with his fists.

JESSE
I've got pains in every *inch* of my body. My ears ring; my eyes are itchy. I'm going to lose my gift of second sight.

BOB
Do you see future things like they were long gone, or do you just get inklings about what's to come?

JESSE shows no inclination to answer.

JESSE
You know Frank and I looked for my father's grave over in Marysville, California?

BOB
You've mentioned that, but not at any length.

JESSE
I could picture the grave and the wooden cross but I couldn't get the geography right. They say it was cholera that killed him. They might as well've said the bubonic plague. You can always tell when it's Satan's work.

BOB
How?

JESSE
Trickery. Empty promises.

JESSE scratches at his jawbeard.

JESSE
You missed the Palm Sunday service.

BOB
I used to go every week but that was because my daddy put a gun to my head.

JESSE shuts his eyes and recites:

JESSE
'For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet council together, and walked unto the house of God in company.'
(beat)
A good preacher will match that up with Matthew twenty-six.

He coughs meanly and spits.

JESSE
Sometimes I get so forlorn and melancholy. Do you ever get that way?

BOB shrugs.

JESSE
Do you know what it is you're most afraid of?

BOB
Yes.

JESSE
What?

BOB
I'm afraid of being forgotten. I'm afraid I'll end up living a life like everyone else's and me being Bob Ford won't matter one way or the other.

JESSE
It isn't always up to you, Bob. It may not be in the cards for ya.

JESSE looks over to Kansas and leans on his knees for a minute.

JESSE
Do you ever get surprised when you see yourself in a mirror? Do you ever find yourself saying, 'Why do they call him by my name?'

It seems to BOB that JESSE expects no response.

JESSE
You're wrapped in a ragged coat for your three score and ten and nobody gets to see who's inside it.

BOB
It's getting chilly.

JESSE
His voice is like a waterfall.

BOB
Whose voice?

JESSE
If I could stand in it for a second or two, all my sins would be washed away.

BOB
I honestly can't follow this conversation.

JESSE smiles.

JESSE
Do you know who I'm jealous of? You. If I could change lives with you right now, I would.

BOB
I guess this must be a case of the grass always being greener.

JESSE
You can go away right now if you want. You can say, 'Jesse, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but the Good Lord didn't put me here to rob the Platte City Bank,' You can go inside and get your gatherings and begin a lifetime of grocery work. I'm roped in already; but you've still got the vote. That's a gift I'd give plenty for.

BOB grips the tattersall quilt around his neck.

BOB
I don't know. I'm not acting according to any plan. I'm just getting out of spots and pressing for my best advantage.

JESSE
You can't always make things happen, Bob.

BOB
Well, like I say, I'm just taking what comes my way.

JESSE rises and crimps his fingers on the metal clothesline, sagging on it a little, looking at the ground.

JESSE
You Fords show your teeth like apes.

The man's gloom seems to BOB to be turning dangerous.

BOB
I'm going to call it a night.

JESSE slumps forward dismally, making the metal hooks complain.

JESSE
Why don't you stay with me a little longer?

BOB
I'm sort of sleepy, Jess.

JESSE
Go ahead then.

BOB pauses at the screen door and turns back to him, perplexed:

BOB
I appreciate your frankness with me. This has been illuminating. I'm going to ponder all you said.

JESSE moves off into darkness.

JESSE
Don't make anything out of it. I was only passing the time.

INT. KITCHEN, HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

ZEE angrily bangs shut the oven door.

ZEE
Oh, shoot!

BOB tucks in his yellow shirt.

BOB
Is that you making all that smoke?

ZEE flips some burned biscuits from a blackened pan.

ZEE
This ornery stove!

BOB moves through the cloud of gray oven smoke to the back door.

EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

He steps over puddles and passes MARY playing with a coffee grinder she's ruined with sand.

He arrives to the backyard cistern and the pump brays like a mule as he works the iron handle. Water splashes into a white enamel bowl. CHARLEY is slouched down in the yard, squatting like a ghost, in a cloud of cigarette smoke.

BOB
Morning.

But his brother ignores him.

BOB brings water to his face and imagines:

INSERT: The gruesome fish he caught in September.

BOB flinches his eyes open and sees ZEE peering at him through the porch screen.

ZEE
How much do you want to eat?

BOB
I'm feeling sort of peculiar.

BOB moves over to the fence where he sees:

JESSE and TIM climbing the steep ascent of the sidewalk. The great man has his hand on the boy's shoulder. JESSE moves the cigar in his mouth and squints through the smoke.

JESSE
How come you're looking so interested?

BOB
Do you think it's intelligent to go outside like that, so all creation can see your guns?

JESSE ignores him and rushes his daughter, monstering, catching MARY as she runs squealing to the screendoor and swinging the girl around so wildly that her right foot loses it's shoe.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

MARY hugs her father's neck as he walks into the dining room. TIM tosses the papers carelessly onto the couch. BOB sees instantly the headlines of the Kansas City Times:

The Arrest and confession of Dick Liddil.

BOB looks to the dining room: the family assembling around the table, CHARLEY slouching in. BOB slips the paper under a shawl and goes into his room.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

BOB straps on the gun he has been given, tying the leather holster to his thigh with a string.

ZEE (OFF-SCREEN)
Bob, everything is getting cold!

INT. DINING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

BOB seats himself across from JESSE. JESSE regards his six-year-old son, who is staring blankly at the sunshine, woolgathering, his oatmeal spoon in his mouth.

JESSE
(to CHARLEY)
What do you think goes on in that noggin of his?

CHARLEY
Nothing.

JESSE
(laughs)
I was referring to his mind, not yours.

JESSE stands from his chair and fetches the newspapers from the sofa. BOB watches as he almost misses and then retrieves the Kansas City times from under the shawl. JESSE sits again and stirs a spoon in his cup.

JESSE
Hello now! The surrender of Dick Liddil.

CHARLEY
(too urgent)
You don't say so!

JESSE
It's very strange.

BOB sees the crease in his brow, the fret in his reading eyes, the nicotine stain on his finger moving down the page.

JESSE
It says here Dick surrendered three weeks ago.

He glances at BOB with misgivings.

JESSE
You must've been right there in the neighborhood.

BOB
Apparently they kept it secret.

JESSE slumps back in his chair and glares at BOB and CHARLEY.

JESSE
It looks sort of fishy to me.

BOB
If I get to Kansas City soon, I'm going to ask somebody about it.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

BOB gets up and goes into the sitting room with his right hand on his gun and reacquaints himself with the rocking chair.

TIM is hunkered down on the stoop outside, coercing the crank on the coffee grinder. MARY squats beside him, pushing her pale dress down between her thighs, stabbing at the earth with a spoon, and repeating:

MARY
Don't. Don't. Don't.

CHARLEY walks into the sitting room.

CHARLEY
It's going to be as hot as a pistol.

He sits on the mattress and loops his holster off the bedpost, looking significantly at BOB as he puts it on.

JESSE surprises them.

JESSE
You two ready?

BOB jumps up from the rocker and it rears and rows, clubbing the floor, until he can still it with his hand.

CHARLEY
I will be by noon.

JESSE looks out the window and sees:

His daughter's shoe on the grass.

JESSE
It's an awfully hot day.

JESSE removes his Prince Albert coat and six button black vest.

CHARLEY shambles over to the screen door to scan Lafayette Street.

JESSE proclaims in a sentence that seems composed just for Bob:

JESSE
I guess I'll take off my pistols for fear the neighbors will spy them if I walk out into the yard.

CHARLEY turns from the screen door with vexation on his face. BOB'S thumb twitches as he lowers his hand to his gun.

JESSE unbuckles his holsters and lays them on the bed as if creating an exhibit.

JESSE focuses on the picture of Skyrocket:

JESSE
That picture's awful dusty.

He withdraws a furniture duster and climbs a rush-bottomed chair.

BOB slinks from the wall and stands between JESSE and his two revolvers.

He shakes his fingers like a gunfighter and instructs his brother with scared eyes.

CHARLEY steps further into the room and the two FORDS slip out their guns.

BOB extends his .44 and cocks it with three soft clicks.

JESSE swivels slightly, authentically surprised, reaching for a gun that isn't there.

Then BOB FORD'S .44 ignites and a red stamp seems to paste itself just behind the outlaw's right ear. His face socks into the watercolor glass. Gunpowder and gun noise fills the room. JESSE drops from his knees and smacks onto the floor like a great animal, shaking the house with his fall.

ZEE rushes into a room that is still blue with smoke and screams.

BOB slowly retreats and straddles the windowsill.

ZEE
What have you done?

BOB looks stricken, as though he wants to apologize but can't.

JESSE looks at the ceiling, his fingers curl and uncurl, his mouth works at making words.

ZEE kneels and cradles his skull in her apron.

ZEE
Jesse, Jesse, Jesse.

Her petticoats are quickly soaked red with his blood.

TIM is at the door; seeing everything.

ZEE
Bob, have you done this?

BOB
I swear to God that I didn't.

JESSE sighs and grows heavy on her legs. His muscles slack; the blood is as wide as a table. He makes a syllable like 'God' and then everything inside him stops. CHARLEY collects their hats and coats.

CHARLEY
The pistol went off accidentally.

The two FORDS make their way to the door.

EXT LAFAYETTE STREET - MORNING

The brothers run down Confusion Hill, their coats flying.

EXT. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT, ST. JOSEPH - MORNING

They cut through yards and down alleys until they attain the American Telegraph office.

INT. AMERICAN TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MORNING

A telegram is being transmitted:

I HAVE KILLED JESSE JAMES. BOB FORD

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

RUBBERNECKERS, NEIGHBORS and CHILDREN are collected in twos and threes in the yard.

BOB and CHARLEY approach DEPUTY JAMES FINLEY. CHARLEY is coughing from his exertions, BOB catches his wind and asks:

BOB
I'm the man who killed the person in that house. He's the notorious outlaw Jesse James, or I am mistaken.

FINLEY looks at BOB like he's playing a stupid prank.

BOB
Are you Marshal Craig?

FINLEY
That's him coming up the hill.

He points out CITY MARSHALL ENOS CRAIG climbing towards them with the coroner DR. JAMES HEDDENS and JOHN LEONARD of the St. Joseph *Gazette*.

BOB runs down to meet them.

BOB
Can I speak to you privately?

The city marshal lingers. The coroner and reporter continue on to the cottage.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

HEDDENS and LEONARD enter. They see the body on the carpet: The left eyelid closed, the right blue eye asleep. The mouth slightly ajar. HEDDENS kneels to take the man's pulse, and examine the excavation in his skull.

DR. HEDDENS
Do you know who it is, John?

The reporter is making notes.

LEONARD
Haven't the slightest idea.

A girl of SIXTEEN comes out of a side room.

GIRL OF SIXTEEN
His wife's in here.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

JOHN LEONARD enters. ZEE sits on the bed and cries into her hands. Her calico dress is saturated with blood. A FAT WOMAN sits beside her with her arm around the widow's shoulder. A girl of twelve is crouched with the children. JOHN LEONARD writes in his notebook.

ZEE
Oh, please don't put this in the paper.

LEONARD
I'm afraid that's my job.

DR. HEDDENS enters.

DR. HEDDENS
What's your name, Madame?

ZEE
Mrs. Howard.

DR. HEDDENS
Is that your husband?

She nods.

DR. HEDDENS
Do you know who killed him?

ZEE
Our two cousins, the Johnsons.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

MARSHAL CRAIG enters with BOB and CHARLEY. JOHN LEONARD is now lodged outside the master bedroom door - discretely recording ZEE'S conversation with HEDDENS. The City Marshal crosses over to the reporter and whispers:

MARSHAL CRAIG
Do you know who these boys say that man is?

LEONARD
Someone named Howard.

MARSHAL CRAIG
They claim its Jesse James.

LEONARD
Go on!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

MARSHAL CRAIG sits on the bed and takes ZEE'S hand.

MARSHAL CRAIG
Mrs. Howard? The boys who have killed your husband are here. They tell me your husband is Jesse James.

ZEE
You don't mean they've come back!

She slumps against his shoulder, weeping.

MARSHAL CRAIG
You know, it would be a lot more restful for your soul if you'd speak the truth. The public would think mighty highly of you; your children wouldn't ever again want for anything.

She rubs her eyes with her sleeve.

ZEE
I want to go see him.

MARSHAL CRAIG
How's that?

ZEE
I want to see my husband.

MARSHAL CRAIG
Just lean your weight on me.

The two walk into the sitting room.

INT. SITTING ROOM, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

BOB shrinks back when he sees ZEE and CHARLEY moves to the screen door.

ZEE
You cowards! You snakes! How could you kill your friend?

CHARLEY slouches outside and BOB follows, clapping the screen door shut.

EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

A SMALL BOY runs down the street yelling:

SMALL BOY
It's Jesse James! Jesse James! Jesse James!

The crowd ogles them. LEONARD approaches.

LEONARD
You mean that really is Jesse James?

CHARLEY
Isn't that what we've been saying since we come?

BOB
Have someone twist off that gold ring on his finger. You'll find a script with the name Jesse James inside.

LEONARD
Why'd you kill him?

BOB
Say: we wanted to rid the country of a bloodthirsty outlaw.

CHARLEY
(smiles)
You should mention the reward too.

LEONARD
You shot him for money?

CHARLEY
Only ten thousand dollars!

BOB scowls at this.

LEONARD
I'll mention that you are young but gritty.

CHARLEY
We are all grit. You never expected to see Jesse's carcass in St. Joe, did you? We thought we'd create a sensation by putting him away.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - LATER.

The body is carried and placed in a glass-sided carriage.

EXT. CONFUSION HILL - DAY

The carriage is followed down the hill by a PROCESSION of MOURNERS including ZEE JAMES.

EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY.

SNOOPS and ONLOOKERS swarm around the cottage, viewing whatever they can through the window.

EXT. BARN - DAY

PEOPLE investigate the stables, appraising the horses. They steal whatever they can fit up their sleeves; horseshoes, hammers, nails.

EXT. YARD, HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

POLICE move people back from the house. They nail the window sashes shut.

In amongst all the bustle an ONLOOKER moves over to TIM and smiles at the boy as if they know each other.

ONLOOKER
So you're Jesse Edwards James.

The boy is mystified.

ONLOOKER
Do you know who Jesse James is?

The boy shakes his head.

ONLOOKER
Do you know what your father's name was?

TIM
Daddy.

The ONLOOKER laughs.

INT. SEIDENFADEN UNDERTAKING - DAY

JESSE'S body is strapped to a board with ropes. The board is tilted nearly vertical and a camera lens uncapped. A room full of CORRESPONDENTS wait for the exposure.

EXT. ALEX LOZO PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO - DAY

REPORTERS follow the PHOTOGRAPHER as he carries the photographic dry-plate back to the studio.

INSERT: JESSE'S REQUIEM PHOTOGRAPH DEVELOPING.

NARRATOR (V/O)
The resulting prints sold for two dollars a piece

INSERT: MAGAZINE COVERS come off a PRINTING PRESS

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
and were the models for the lithographed covers on a number of magazines.

EXT. RAIL DEPOT - DAY

A sign is hung announcing departure times to St. Joseph.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
Railway companies had by then rather gleefully scheduled special coaches that would carry the inquisitive to the city at greatly reduced rates;

EXT. LAFAYETTE ST - DAY

CROWDS make the journey up Confusion Hill.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
Soon a thousand strangers were making spellbound pilgrimages to the cottage

INT. SEIDENFADEN UNDERTAKING - DAY

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
or were venerating the iced remains in Seidenfaden's cooling room.

ZEE JAMES sits catatonically in a chair, unmindful of the other visitors, merely staring at the slain man.

Move in on JESSE.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
The man who offered thirty thousand dollars for the body of Charles Guiteau sent a telegram to City Marshal Enos Craig offering fifty thousand for the body of Jesse Woodson James so that he could go around the country with it, or at least sell it to P. T. Barnum for his 'Greatest Show on Earth.'

REPORTER MONTAGE:

EXT. ST JOSEPH/VARIOUS - DAY

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
Reporters roamed the city, gathering anecdotes and apocrypha, garnering interviews with the principals. Studies showed that real Estate values in Missouri would increase by thirty-three percent with the removal of the outlaw, and one reporter noted that a man who was selling his farm had already raised the price by five hundred dollars.

INT. JACOB SPENCER'S LIBRARY - NIGHT

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
Jacob Spencer, the man who owned the St. Joseph News, went to his library late that afternoon and began seven nights work on what would become *The Life and Career of Frank and Jesse James,*

INT. BOOKSTORE, COMMERCIAL DISTRICT, ST. JOSEPH - DAY

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
a two hundred-page book that sold out as soon as it reached the stores on April 12th. Five hundred thousand copies would have been needed to meet the demand.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - NIGHT

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
A man crept into the cottage that night and cut out a swatch of the bloodstained carpet.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
The next afternoon he was in Chicago selling square inches of the material for five dollars.

EXT. HANNIBAL AND ST. JOSEPH RAILROAD DEPOT - DAY

Rain. ZERELDA SAMUELS steps off the train and is greeted by a great throng awaiting her on the platform. She moves in their midst like an Amazon queen - accepting solace and sympathy and sprays of wildflowers.

INT. SEIDENFADEN UNDERTAKING - DAY

ZERELDA totters as she walks to the stone slab on which her third born son sleeps.

VOICE (OFF-SCREEN)
Can you identify this man as Jesse Woodson James?

ZERELDA
Yes, it's my son; would to God that it were not.

She caresses his cold cheek and cries:

ZERELDA
O, Jesse! Jesse! Why have they taken you from me? O, the miserable traitors!

As the grief stricken mother is led away, a PHOTOGRAPHER is led in:

NARRATOR (V/O)
Another photograph was taken of the renowned American bandit constricted in his small walnut coffin.

INSERT: this new image of JESSE, followed by the HISTORICAL MONUMENTS to which he's compared:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D))
And it was this shot that was most available in sundries stores and apothecaries, to be viewed in a stereoscope along with the Sphinx, the Taj Mahal, the Catacombs of Rome.

EXT. A FUNERAL PROCESSION MAIN STREET, ST. JOSEPH - DAY

Rain makes slime of the streets. Yet more than 400 MOURNERS slog after the express company wagon that carries the iron casket to the Hannibal and St. Joseph depot.

MRS. SAMUELS, MRS. JAMES, and the TWO CHILDREN follow in a covered hackney.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE, HENRY CRAIG, and VARIOUS DEPUTIES and CORRESPONDENTS come after them in carriages festooned with black crepe ribbons and bows.

CROWDS line the sidewalk, under wet umbrellas or with hair washed slick against their skulls.

A CRACKPOT raises a purse pistol and fires at MRS. SAMUELS.

HENRY CRAIG and another MAN leap from their carriage and tackle the drunk into an alley.

INT. ALLEY, ST. JOSEPH - DAY

Here they beat him roundly and sprawl him into the gutter.

EXT. MOVING TRAIN - DAY

THOUSANDS fence the railroad line, removing their hats as the train passes by. The Coffin is lashed to the rear platform. SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE sits upon it, smoking a pipe.

REVEREND MARTIN (OVER)
Man that is born of woman is of a few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth as a shadow and continueth not.

EXT. SAMUELS FARM, KEARNEY - DAY

A VAST NUMBER is gathered in the yard.

The open casket rests on chairs under the shade of the coffee bean tree.

REVEREND MARTIN (CONTINUED)
Lord make me to know mine end and the measure of my days; that I may know how frail I am. Behold thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

We get our last glimpse of JESSE as the casket is covered and nailed shut. On the lid is a silver plate with the name 'Jesse James' spelled out in German Gothic lettering.

ZEE and ZERELDA are overmastered by grief and throw themselves on the casket, ZERELDA screaming:

ZERELDA
How can I stand it? How can I stand it? How can I stand it?

NARRATOR (V/O)
Zerelda Samuels insisted that the casket be reopened to make certain that her son's arms and legs had not been sawn off and replaced with limbs of wax.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE goes dutifully for a screwdriver.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
But Reverend Martin soothed the woman with practiced words about a calculus in heaven that adjusts for our privations and compensates for our losses.

The casket is jarringly lowered on ropes as those gathered sing 'We Will Wait Till Jesus Comes'

FADE OUT

INT. ALEX LOZO'S PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO - DAY

BOB sits for a studio portrait. He poses on a staircase with a gleaming peacemaker artificially rested on his left thigh. A CROWD of REPORTERS attend him.

REPORTER
How do you feel, Bob?

BOB
Bully.

REPORTER
You're right handed ain't ya, Bob?

BOB
Yep.

REPORTER
Then why have you got the gun in your left?

BOB
Jesse was left-handed.

INSERT: THE RESULTING PICTURE:

BOB looks impossibly young, like a grocery clerk accidentally caught with a pistol in his hand.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He could still smell the gunpowder on his fingers, could still feel the jolt of the gun going off. But that was all. He'd seen no phantoms. Listened to no incorporeal voices. Was subjected to no nightmares. He was asked if he was afraid of reprisals by Frank James but revenge was not a worry really; it was if no person could harm him once Jesse was underground.

FADE OUT:

MANHATTAN
ONE YEAR LATER

EXT. BROADWAY THEATRE (ESTABLISHING) - NIGHT

INT. BROADWAY THEATRE - NIGHT

We are behind an actor silhouetted by footlights:

ACTOR
Hello, here! The surrender of Dick Liddil! Young man, I thought you told me you didn't know that Dick had surrendered.

PAN to reveal BOB: He's groomed as a European Prince, and sports a glued-on mustache:

BOB
You mean he did? I didn't know!

FRONT ANGLE: BOB and CHARLEY are on a stage: The set behind them resembles the sitting room of the cottage on Confusion Hill. CHARLEY re-sticks his moustache and continues his bad impersonation of JESSE:

CHARLEY
Well, it's very strange. He surrendered three weeks ago and you was right there in the neighborhood. It looks fishy.

NARRATOR (V/O)
It was widely felt that Bob possessed some acting talent and Charley not a jot:

CHARLEY takes off his revolvers and flings them onto the bed - his voice yells for the balcony:

CHARLEY
In case you're wondering why I took my guns off, it's because I might want to walk in the yard.

NARRATOR(V/O)
Charley was only expected not to slouch or mutter and to transport his sicknesses to the alley before letting them go.

CHARLEY'S fetches a feather duster and flags it towards an implausible painting of the death of Julius Caesar:

CHARLEY
That picture's awful dusty!

BOB rises surreptitiously from his chair. CHARLEY flicks the duster. BOB rests his hand on his gun and turns to the audience:

BOB
Up to that moment the thought of killing him had never entered my mind, but as he stood there, unarmed, it came to me suddenly, 'Now or never is your chance. If you don't get him now, he'll get you tonight.'

BOB raises his gun.

Some in the audience stir with anticipation.

BOB lets the hammer snap and a charge of gunpowder explodes with a great noise on the stage.

The audience gasps.

CHARLEY reels on the chair, claps his palms to his chest and crashes unauthentically to the floor.

A GIRL playing Mrs. James runs onto stage from the right and permits herself a blood-curdling scream.

The house lights dim to darkness. Then rise on a stage which contains only Robert Ford. He slings his gun and proclaims with gravity:

BOB
That is how I killed Jesse James.

The curtain rings down to magnanimous applause.

INT. MANHATTAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT.

BOB, dressed in fine clothes, eats in an elegant restaurant, fawned over by PRETTY TEENAGED dancing girls. They are a rowdy group.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - DAY

GIRLS approach BOB and his DATE at the seashore.

INT. FANCY HOTEL - DAY

A GROUP of PEOPLE approach BOB in a hotel lobby, wanting to shake his hand. Over these images we hear the narrator:

NARRATOR (V/O)
By October of 1883, Bob Ford could be identified correctly by more citizens than could the president of the United States. He was as renowned at twenty as Jesse was after fourteen years of Grand Larceny. In an age where the average wage was twelve cents an hour, Bob was making fifty dollars a performance, so he could easily think himself rich.

INT. CHARLEY'S HOTEL ROOM, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

CHARLEY, looking harried and hollow eyed and lonely. Surrounded by occult paraphernalia.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Charley was increasingly superstitious, increasingly subject to the advice of gypsies who promised to cure his miseries with green teas, pipe smoke, poultices, even jolts of electricity cranked into his wrists with a magnet generator.

INT. ELEGANT RESTAURANT - NIGHT

CHARLEY has joined BOB and one of his GIRLFRIENDS for dinner. CHARLEY whispers into the girl's ear:

CHARLEY
I know exactly who you're working for. You won't get your hooks into me.

The GIRLFRIEND is disturbed.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He compared all females unfavorably to Mrs. Zee James, whom he spoke of as certain priests might the Madonna,

INT. CHARLEY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

CHARLEY writes:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
and composed long, soul describing letters to her, begging her forgiveness, none of which he mailed.

INT. BROADWAY THEATRE - NIGHT

Details of the performance: CHARLEY'S walk, his mouth, his hand gestures.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Something began to change in Charley's stage portrayal of Jesse: his limp seemed more practiced, his high voice was spookily similar to the man's, his newly suggested dialogue was analogous to a script Jesse might have originated.

BOB'S performance is enhanced too; by very real alarm at his brother.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Too many gunshots on the stage and too many resignations to Bob's betrayal were separating the Ford Brothers as Charley accepted the obligation of personifying Jesse James.

CLOSE on CHARLEY/JESSE looking antagonistically at BOB.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He began to look at his younger brother with spite, as if he suspected that in some future performance he might present himself to a live cartridge in Robert Ford's gun.

A disturbed and shaken BOB shoots CHARLEY/JESSE yet again.

INT. BOWERY SALOON - NIGHT

BOB is drunk, wrung out and disheveled. A SINGER tunes his guitar and begins to play:

SINGER
Jesse James was a man who killed many men/He robbed the Glendale train/He stole from the rich and he gave to the poor/he'd a hand and a heart and a brain.

The SINGER begins to stroll the room: coming so near BOB that BOB has to pull back his legs to let him pass.

SINGER (CONT'D)
Oh Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life/three children, they were brave/But that dirty little coward that shot Mister Howard has laid Jesse James in his grave.

BOB works at registering no change in expression.

SINGER (CONT'D)
It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward/I wonder how does he feel?/For he ate of Jesse's bread/and he slept in Jesse's bed/ Then he laid Jesse James in his grave.

Finally BOB can stand it no longer. He takes out his gun and fires into the floor. The noise is deafening. Everyone turns to BOB in the silence that follows. BOB lurches slowly to his feet.

BOB
(swaying drunk)
I'm Robert Ford.

He flings his pistol at the SINGER and tilts slightly from the alcohol.

BOB
You gonna fight me, see who the coward is?

SINGER
I ain't gonna fight you, boy. You get on outta here.

BOB
Huh?

MAN AT THE RAIL
Sleep it off.

Someone slaps Bob on the back, sending him a step or two before he regains himself.

BOB
Any you wanna fight me? Huh? Who's it gonna be?

They look at him silently. Watch as he slips on peanut shells, and ends up on the floor, tears glinting in his eyes. He gets to his feet and sways for a moment.

SALOONKEEPER
Get on home now, son. Go on! Get yourself outta my place.

EXT. BOWERY STREET - MORNING

BOB wakes with a dog licking his face.

INT. BOSTON THEATRE - NIGHT

A voice comes from the dark beyond the footlights:

HECKLER (UNSEEN)
Murderer! Cur!

BOB strides towards the insults.

HECKLER (UNSEEN)
Coward!

BOB shields his eyes from the glare, searching for his antagonist in the large audience:

BOB
You want to investigate my courage? Do you?

The HECKLER stands in the crowd.

HECKLER
Coward!

BOB leaps from the stage and springs himself at the HECKLER, swinging punches at his skull. Striking him a dozen times before others yank him off. BOB smashes into them as well, his fists striking blood from their lips and shattering their noses as the audience of three hundred stampedes from the theatre.

INT. THEATRE LOBBY - LATER

BOB'S clothes are shredded and he's covered in blood from head to toe as he's shackled by POLICEMEN.

POLICEMAN
You may be the Ford brothers or the James Brothers but you cahnt drink blood in Boston.

EXT. BUCKINGHAM THEATRE, LOUIVILLE, KENTUCKY - DAY

A 'sold out' sticker is plastered over the playbill for *I shot Jesse James*.

INT. BUCKINGHAM THEATRE - NIGHT

BOB stands silhouetted on stage while a great crowd hisses and jeers and pelts him with garbage. When he uneasily raises his gun at CHARLEY/JESSE they riot: Surging over the footlights, swamping him and destroying the set.

NARRATOR (V/O)
By his own approximation, Bob assassinated Jesse James over eight hundred times; he suspected no one in history had ever so often or so publicly recapitulated an act of betrayal, and he imagined that no degree of grief or penitence could change the country's ill regard for him. He thought about committing suicide, but decided even that would be judged just one more act of cowardice.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, KANSAS CITY - DAY

BOB steps off the train. He is going on 22. He's dapper, glamorous, physically strong, comparatively rich, and psychologically injured.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, KANSAS CITY - DAY

A MAN crosses the street to spit on him.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He thought, at his angriest, about visiting the kin of Jesse's slaughtered victims: Mrs. William Westfall in Plattsburg, the Wymore family in Clay County, perhaps even Mrs. Joseph Heywood in Northfield, Minnesota. He would go to their homes and give his name as Robert Ford, 'The man who killed Jesse James.' He imagined they would be grateful to him.

EXT. SAMUEL'S FARM - NIGHT

BOB sneaks up on the SAMUEL'S HOMESTEAD.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
But in actuality Bob made only one irregular journey and that one was to Kearney, Missouri.

BOB stands before the nine foot monument under the coffee bean tree and runs his fingers over the inscription:

In Loving Remembrance
JESSE W. JAMES
Died April 3, 1882
Murdered By a Traitor and Coward
Whose Name Is Not Worthy To
Appear Here.

Hold on BOB.

FADE OUT

INT. CHARLEY'S ROOM - DAY.

CHARLEY FORD enters the room and lays down on his bed. He takes his revolver from it's scabbard and shoots himself through the heart.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Charley Ford became all that his countrymen wanted an assassin of Jesse James to be.

EXT. RICHMOND - DAY

A funeral: The SURVIVING FORDS watch CHARLEY'S COFFIN being lowered into the ground.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Except for Bob, the rest of the Fords completed their lifetimes peacefully and disappeared from history.

SAMUEL'S FARM (MONTAGE) - DAY

Action as per voice-over:

NARRATOR (V/O)
Zerelda Samuels remained on the Kearney farm. Her greatest source of income was the twenty-five cent tours of the grounds and rooms, during which she gave gasconades about her slaughtered sons. She would cozen many of her guests, make them feel especially privileged, and at last agree to sell them a stone from the grave or, at much greater expense, a worn shoe from one of the James boy's steeds.

(These we see he her buying from a BLACKSMITH by the wheelbarrow load. The stones are shoveled from Clear Creek and spread on the grave.)

ZERELDA SAMUELS (GLASS PLATE PHOTOGRAPH)

NARRATOR (V/O)
She outlived three husbands and four of the eight children she bore and she showed no signs of sickness when she retired to a pullman sleeper in 1911 and there died of a stroke at the age of eighty-seven.

INT. HOTEL, KANSAS CITY - DAY

ZEE JAMES works with a bucket and mop.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Zee returned to Kansas City in 1882 and worked there as a cleaning woman and seamstress in a manner that many construed as penitent.

INT. ZEE'S ROOM - DAY.

ZEE, alone.

NARRATOR (V/O)
She retired from the public eye, shunning reporters, seeking retreat. She felt crippled, forsaken, marooned. Jesse was her vitality, her vigor, her crucial ingredient and she gratefully accepted death in 1900 at the age of fifty-five.

INT. MARY JAME'S HOME - DAY.

MARY JAMES, now an adult, at dinner with her family.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Her daughter, Mary, married an affluent farmer and gave birth to three boys on a property across the road from her father's birthplace. She called no particular attention to her heritage and many who knew her when she passed away in 1935 were surprised by her maiden name.

JESSE EDWARDS JAMES (PHOTO MONTAGE)

Actual stills of JESSE JNR at various times in his life and clips from the movies described:

NARRATOR (V/O)
Her brother took great advantage of the name Jesse Edwards James. He played semi-professional baseball, ran a cigar stand, and became an attorney-at-law in Kansas and Los Angeles. When Jesse was twenty-four he wrote the memoir *Jesse James My Father;* in 1921 he financed and acted in the movie *Under the Black Flag,* and some years later he was a highly paid technical adviser to Paramount Pictures when they produced their counterfeit *Jesse James,* starring Tyrone Power. Jesse Edwards James died in California in 1951.

EXT. BALTIMORE STREET - DAY

NARRATOR (V/O)
Alexander Franklin James was in Baltimore when he read about the assassination of Jesse James.

FRANK walks past a newspaper stand and sees the headline 'Its Jesse, by Jehova.'

NARRATOR (V/O)
He had spurned his younger brother for being peculiar and temperamental, but once he perceived he'd never see Jesse again, Frank was wrought up, perplexed, despondent.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK - DAY.

FRANK, grief-stricken and isolated.

NARRATOR (V/O)
The East seemed a foreign country to him, and whichever city he visited seemed an uninhabited island without Jesse alive.

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE, JEFFERSON CITY - DAY

A CROWD of REPORTERS, OFFICALS and POLICE have gathered to witness FRANK'S surrender:

NARRATOR (V/O)
Frank surrender his arms to governor Crittenden on October 5th, 1882.

FRANK
(to CRITTENDEN)
I want to hand over to you my guns which no man has been permitted to touch since 1861, and to say that I am your prisoner.

PHOTO MONTAGE:

FRANK at parties. CROWDS awaiting his appearance at train stations, etc.

NARRATOR (V/O)
The government accorded privileges to Frank James; he was given parties, gentile receptions, magnificent presents and accommodations, an opulent coach carried him to his trials in Jackson County; to some it seemed that the State of Missouri had surrendered to Frank James rather than the other way round.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY.

FRANK in the witness box. We cant hear what he's saying but his manner is cool and collected.

NARRATOR (V/O)
He evinced dignity, intelligence, rectitude and sobriety. He represented every quality that gentlemen then were eager to possess. He could speak passable German and French; he could recite one thousand lines of Shakespeare; he was not suspiciously attractive; he had fought on the right side in the Civil War.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

A jubilant CROWD has gathered. FRANK shakes hands with members of the JURY.

NARRATOR (V/O)
So it was that in spite of more than circumstantial evidence linking Frank James to a great many crimes, the man never served a day in the penitentiary.

FRANK'S JOBS (A PHOTO MONTAGE)

NARRATOR (V/O)
He acted as a race starter, a shoe salesman, he accepted tickets at the Standard Theatre in St. Louis, refusing all invitations to see the saucy burlesque show inside.

EXT. CIVIL WAR CEMETARY - DAY

FRANK wanders among the gravestones, attended by a REPORTER:

NARRATOR (V/O)
He was a survivor and it made him feel guilty. It seemed to Frank that grace came upon him without merit, that he'd been pardoned without justification or purpose.

FRANK squatted at an ill-kept grave. He straightens and roughs the earth from his hands:

FRANK
'Then two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'

MONTAGE: SAMUELS FARM

FRANK, nearing the end of his life.

NARRATOR (V/O)
After his mother's death he settled once again on the Kearney farm. Here he lived out his days, walking from room to room with tourists, who now paid fifty cents to see the Bible that Jesse read, and one of the guns he shot. Alexander Franklin James died on February 18th 1915.

FADE OUT.

CREEDE, COLORADO 1892

EXT. EXCHANGE CLUB - DAY

We are moving behind a man pulling ice in a child's red wagon. He comes upon a young woman (DOROTHY EVANS) in a long green gown of dainty frills and ruffles.

DOROTHY
I was expecting someone old and ugly.

BOB
Creede has a supply of them: just who in particular?

DOROTHY
You are Bob Ford?

FRONT ANGLE on BOB FORD, now thirty years old.

BOB
And proud of it too.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - DAY

Against all odds, BOB has prospered; his Exchange Club is a palace. DOROTHY EVANS gives BOB her story:

DOROTHY
I was brought up in an orphanage run by the sisters of Mercy. My only skirt was a flour sack until I married a mining engineer in Denver. He died of pneumonia, though, and desperation has pushed me into the life of a courtesan.

BOB
You mean a prostitute. You don't have to sugar things with me.

DOROTHY
I'm not ashamed of it; I just like the word.

BOB
I've got some call for it, if you're willing.

DOROTHY
Could be.

She pulls a gold case from her purse and BOB lights her cigarette.

BOB
You know who I am?

She nods eagerly, like a girl slightly in love with her teacher.

DOROTHY
Bob Ford.

BOB
The man who shot Jesse James.

DOROTHY
I've seen your picture.

BOB
So you were lying.

DOROTHY
Excuse me?

BOB
You said you were expecting someone old and ugly, when you knew just what I looked like.

DOROTHY
(sweet smile)
I was making conversation.

BOB
How much of that is true, about the orphanage and the Sisters of Mercy and the mining engineer?

DOROTHY
Hardly any.

BOB is finding her very engaging:

BOB
Do you have a given name or do you just generally make something up?

DOROTHY
Dorothy.

BOB
You <u>can</u> sing though, can't you?

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

DOROTHY sings 'Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage' for a packed house

NARRATOR (V/O)
It was only with Dorothy Evans that Bob spoke revealingly or plainly, and it was with her that he spoke of things he didn't know he knew.

EXT. STREETS, CREEDE - DAY

BOB and DOROTHY stroll the snowy streets of Creede. BOB is extraordinary in his dress; a dandy in his gentleman's clothes and cane. SHOPKEEPERS and CITIZENS greet him, defer to him. He is like a king in this town.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He told her that he had no real memory of the shooting and its aftermath: He could remember lifting the gun that Jesse had given him and then it was Good Friday and he was reading about the funeral proceedings as if they'd happened a long time ago.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DAY

BOB and DOROTHY are among a crowd of ICE-SKATERS, enjoying the Sunday afternoon:

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He explained that he'd kept the newspaper clippings from April 1882 and repeatedly poured over them, each time feeling aped, cruelly maligned by the Robert Ford that the correspondents chose to put into print.

On BOB, happy.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He was ashamed of his persiflage, his boasting, his pretensions of courage and ruthlessness; he was sorry about his cold-bloodedness, his dispassion, his inability to express what he now believed was the case:

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

DOROTHY brings him a beer.

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
That he truly regretted killing Jesse, that he missed the man as much as anybody and wished his murder hadn't been necessary.

DOROTHY
Was it?

BOB looks at her without comment.

DOROTHY
How I mean it is: why was it you killed him?

BOB
He was going to kill me.

DOROTHY
So you were scared and that's the only reason?

He sips from his beer.

BOB
And the reward money.

DOROTHY
Do you want me to change the subject?

He looks at her in a calculating way.

BOB
Do you know what I expected? Applause. I was only twenty years old then. I couldn't see how it would look to people. I've been surprised by what's happened.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

EDWARD O KELLY comes in and takes a seat at the crowded bar. He seems to argue with himself before shrugging off his wool coat. He seems wild, insane, and fifty years old, though he's only thirty-five.

O KELLY unsnugs his gun and jostles through the gambling hall crowd to close on BOB. He pulls up his pistol.

FEMALE BYSTANDER
He's going to kill you!

But BOB only smiles and pretends he's Jesse as he approaches KELLY with arms outstretched:

BOB
Hey! You oughta let bygones be bygones!

His congenial grin slows O KELLY just enough to allow BOB to slap his cheek and clasp his pistol. He jolts O KELLY awry and slams his knee into the man's mouth. O KELLY collapses with a split upper lip and then BOB slams his skull with the pistol.

BOB
Get out! Get out and don't you ever set foot in my place again.

O KELLY
I guess I will if I want to.

BOB stamps the floor and O KELLY shies, cringing under his lifted arm. BOB laughs and rejoins the corner table of gamblers. They clap his back with approval. DOROTHY crosses to him, and he says to her:

BOB
It just goes on and on.

ANGLE ON:

SOAPY SMITH, a confidence man, sitting with his BODYGUARDS, watching O KELLY get back into his coat, and exiting into the snow storm.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

SOAPY SMITH catches up to KELLY under an arc lamp. Blood is dripping off the man's chin and he spits out chips of teeth like gravel.

O KELLY
Second time I've tried to get that son of a bitch.

SOAPY wings an arm around the man's neck.

SOAPY SMITH
Why don't we see if we can't get you stitched up.

INT. BOB & DOROTHY'S APARTMENT - DAY

BOB sits in a green leather chair while SOAPY SMITH prowls his apartment with a cigar and brandy snifter, appraising objects in the room.

SOAPY SMITH
So, you know who I am?

BOB
I've heard stories; not that I put much stock in what those goddamn newspapers say.

SOAPY SMITH
You couldn't, could you.

BOB
Meaning what?

SOAPY ignores that, his attention on the paperweight he's holding.

BOB
Just what was it you had in mind with this meeting? Outside of making an inventory of all my worldly goods.

SOAPY resettles in a chair and swishes brandy from cheek to cheek.

SOAPY SMITH
Do you know what you shoulda done about Jesse?

BOB
No; why don't you tell me.

SOAPY SMITH
(smiles)
I will then. One night you oughta gone out and sorta lagged behind old Jess on your horse. You get your gun out and yell his name and once he spins around, bang! You coulda said you two had an argument and shot it out and you come out the victor. I guess you never thought of it though.

BOB
I wasn't big enough.

SOAPY SMITH
You sure done the wrong thing, killing the man with his wife and kids close by, and his guns off and, well, you know what you did. You oughta said you were sorry.

BOB
I figure if I'm sorry or not, that's my own business.

SOAPY SMITH
Don't matter! You ought to apologize and give 'em what they want! A man looks at Bob Ford now and you know what he sees? He sees pride and greed and no regrets.

BOB
I'm not begging for forgiveness. I'm going to get people to respect me for my accomplishments, just like Jesse did.

SOAPY scratches his beard.

SOAPY SMITH
Do you know Joe Simmons?

BOB
I've said pleased-to-meetcha.

SOAPY SMITH
Joe and me have been talking about you and Creede and how things are and we thought maybe we'd begin a saloon and gambling hall like yours. We figure maybe we'll get rich by pushing de booze over de boards.

BOB
Do you think there's much call for another saloon? They say there's one for every five men as it is?

SOAPY SMITH
I'm going to get in and make the others get out.

BOB
Just out of curiosity: how are you going to do that?

SOAPY SMITH
My gang, Bob! I'm going to be the government! I'm going to run things around here! Y'all come over to my way of thinking or, bingo, out you go!

BOB
I forgot how to get scared ten years ago.

SOAPY SMITH
I figured that too.

SOAPY gets up:

SOAPY SMITH
You and me, we're exactly alike. If the time comes for killing Robert Ford, I guess you'll know what I'll do.

BOB
Like I said: I've already been as scared as I'll ever be.

SOAPY exits and BOB goes over to the windows that look over the street.

He sees SOAPY laughing with his BODYGUARDS as he slogs through the snow. He sees SHOPKEEPERS greeting the man and giving way on the sidewalk.

He slumps against the wall.

EXT. BOB & DOROTHY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A slaughtered cat is nailed to his door, along with a note that reads, 'Get out of town.'

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O)
Even as he circulated his saloon he knew that the smiles disappeared when he passed by.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - DAY

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He received so many menacing letters in the mail that he could read them without any reaction except curiosity.

INT. BOB & DOROTHY'S APARTMENT - DAY

(Action as per voice-over:)

NARRATOR (V/O CONT'D)
He kept to his apartment all day, flipping over playing cards, looking at his destiny in every King and Jack.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

Fire grows like ivy over the wooden walls. Wallpaper peels up from the floors. Glassware explodes.

EXT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

A conflagration.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE OMAHA CLUB - NIGHT

A grand opening. Music. REVELERS spilling out onto the streets.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Bob called his fifth saloon the Omaha Club and the grand opening was such a success that Nellie Russell sought Mr. Ford out, saying that she'd accept any job with him, even one as a prostitute:

EXT. RIO GRANDE AVENUE - NIGHT

BOB and MISS NELLIE RUSSELL stand at the top of Rio Grande Avenue. BOB sees the lights of cooking fires in the foothills. He hears the happy uproar of the OMAHA CLUB.

NELLIE RUSSELL
I could've recognized you anywhere. You're just like your photograph.

BOB
I'm not just like the boy in that photograph, though. I've aged.

NELLIE RUSSELL
I thought you were so daring and romantic. I thought you were the most glamorous man alive.

BOB
I get along fine with girls of ten, it's when they grow to be eleven or twelve that I'm a goner.

She giggles, and then her thoughts must anguish her, for she grows quiet and grips her shawl around her. Silence.

NELLIE RUSSELL
I guess an angel must be flying over us.

BOB makes no comment.

NELLIE RUSSELL
The mountains are so steep everywhere! It's like you're inside an envelope!

BOB
You were going to ask me what Jesse was like.

NELLIE RUSSELL
How'd you know?

BOB
They always do.

BOB takes MISS RUSSELL'S elbow and they begin the descending walk back to the OMAHA CLUB.

BOB
Jesse James was bigger than you can imagine, and he was hungry all the time. He ate all the food in the dining room and he ate all the plates and the glasses and the light off the candles and the air out of your lungs and the thoughts right out of your mind. You'd go to him, wanting to be with him, wanting to be like him, and you'd always come away missing something.

BOB looks at the girl with anger, and of course she is looking peculiarly at him.

BOB
So now you know why I shot him.

MISS RUSSELL sights the ground as they walk, and when she speaks again there is grief in her voice:

NELLIE RUSSELL
My father would read to us about it from the newspapers he bought. He said we were living through a great moment in history. He thought you'd done the world a big favor.

BOB
On your right is the Leadville Headquarters. Over there is the smithy's shop. You can't see them from here but I've got four green tents behind the club and men go in and out all night.

NELLIE RUSSELL
You're making me sad.

He can see by the lights in her eyes that the girl is crying.

BOB
You ought to go back.

She shakes her head.

BOB
Don't work for me.

NELLIE RUSSELL
No?

BOB
You've got your dignity yet; I wouldn't give it away for money.

INT. EDWARD O KELLY'S CABIN - NIGHT

A rapping at the door. EDWARD O'KELLY rises from his bed and lets in a figure in an orange beaver coat. O KELLY sits and scratches himself:

SOAPY
You and wash soap ought to meet once or twice.

O KELLY
You woke me.

SOAPY
You hear that music?

SOAPY lights a cigar. There's the distant sound of a piano.

SOAPY
It's the Omaha Club. Bob Ford's having his grand opening tonight.

O KELLY spits.

O KELLY
I'll give him a grand opening one of these days.

SOAPY scratches his head.

SOAPY
I come to tell ya regarding that. He's got on one of his periodicals and he's puffed himself up to say he's going to kill Ed Kelly on sight.

O KELLY
Why, that son of a bitch!

SOAPY
And Bob's one of the most plausible talkers I ever seen.

O KELLY
I expect he'll ask me to turn my back first.

SOAPY sucks on his cigar and looks at it as he blows smoke.

SOAPY
You oughta do something.

O KELLY
I'll go down there now and give him a straightening.

SOAPY
I'd give it till around afternoon if I were you.

EXT. RIO GRANDE AVENUE - DAY

The body of MISS NELLIE RUSSELL is brought into town on a wagon pulled by RAILROAD CREWMEN. The wagon passes by DOROTHY EVANS.

INT. BOB & DOROTHY'S APARTMENT - DAY

BOB is dressed in his gentleman's clothes, affixing his cravat with an opal stick pin. DOROTHY enters.

DOROTHY
You know that girl you were talking to about a job? She went and killed herself.

BOB
(sighs)
Oh, God.

He sits on the end of the bed and gazes at nothing for some time.

DOROTHY
You were right not to give her a job, Bob.

BOB gets up and walks out of the room without saying anything. We stay on DOROTHY.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Dorothy Evans would be married in 1900 to a Mr. James Feeney of Durango, Colorado. She would adopt two daughters, and, according to gossip, she would mistreat them. Her legal marriage would be joyless and one Sunday morning she would get into her green wedding dress, telling her daughters she was going to take a nap. She would then pour chloroform into a cloth and press it to her nose until she perished.

INT. THE OMAHA CLUB - DAY

BOB skims the mail and collects his subscription newspapers.

EXT. RIO GRANDE AVENUE - DAY

EDWARD O KELLY trudges towards a rendezvous.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Edward O. Kelly came down from Bachelor at 1 p.m. on the 8th. He had no grand scheme, no strategy, no agreement with higher authorities, nothing beyond a vague longing for glory and a generalized wish for revenge against Robert Ford.

KELLY is joined by JOE DUVAL, who carries a twin-barrel, ten-gauge shotgun. They repair themselves to a machinist's shop.

INT. MACHINIST'S SHOP - DAY

Here they collect metal shavings and, using a paper funnel, fill up first the right shotgun barrel and then the left.

NARRATOR (V/O)
Edward O. Kelly would be ordered to serve a life sentence in the Colorado penitentiary for second degree murder. Over seven thousand signatures would eventually be gathered on a petition asking for Kelly's release, and in 1902 Governor James B. Orman would pardon the man. He would write gruesome letters to Bob Ford's widow, but otherwise do nothing except get arrested on charges of vagrancy and ramble from one insignificant town to the next, before his death in 1904.

INT. THE OMAHA CLUB - DAY

ELLA MAE WATERSON pours jiggers of whisky to a group of miners. BOB removes his suit coat and hangs it on a nail. He then removes his cartridge belt, winds it around his gun and snugs this against the cash register.

MINER
You shouldn't be wearing that stickpin again, Bob. Opals are unlucky.

BOB
My luck isn't very good as it is. I guess an opal couldn't change it much.

MINER
I hear you.

EXT. RIO GRANDE AVENUE to INT. OMAHA CLUB - DAY

We follow O KELLY as he makes his way up the street to the Omaha Club.

NARRATOR (V/O)
There would be no eulogies for Bob, no photographs of his body would be sold in sundries stores, no people would crowd the streets in the rain to see his funeral cortege, no biographies would be written about him, no children named after him, no one would ever pay twenty-five cents to stand in the rooms he grew up in.

O KELLY enters with his shotgun raised and catches the man who shot Jesse James laughing with ELLA MAE WATERSON and giving his back to the street.

O KELLY
Hello, Bob!

BOB turns to the greeting and we freeze on his face.

NARRATOR (V/O)
The shotgun would ignite, and Ella May would scream, but Robert Ford would only lay on the floor and look at the ceiling, the light going out of his eyes before he could find the right words.